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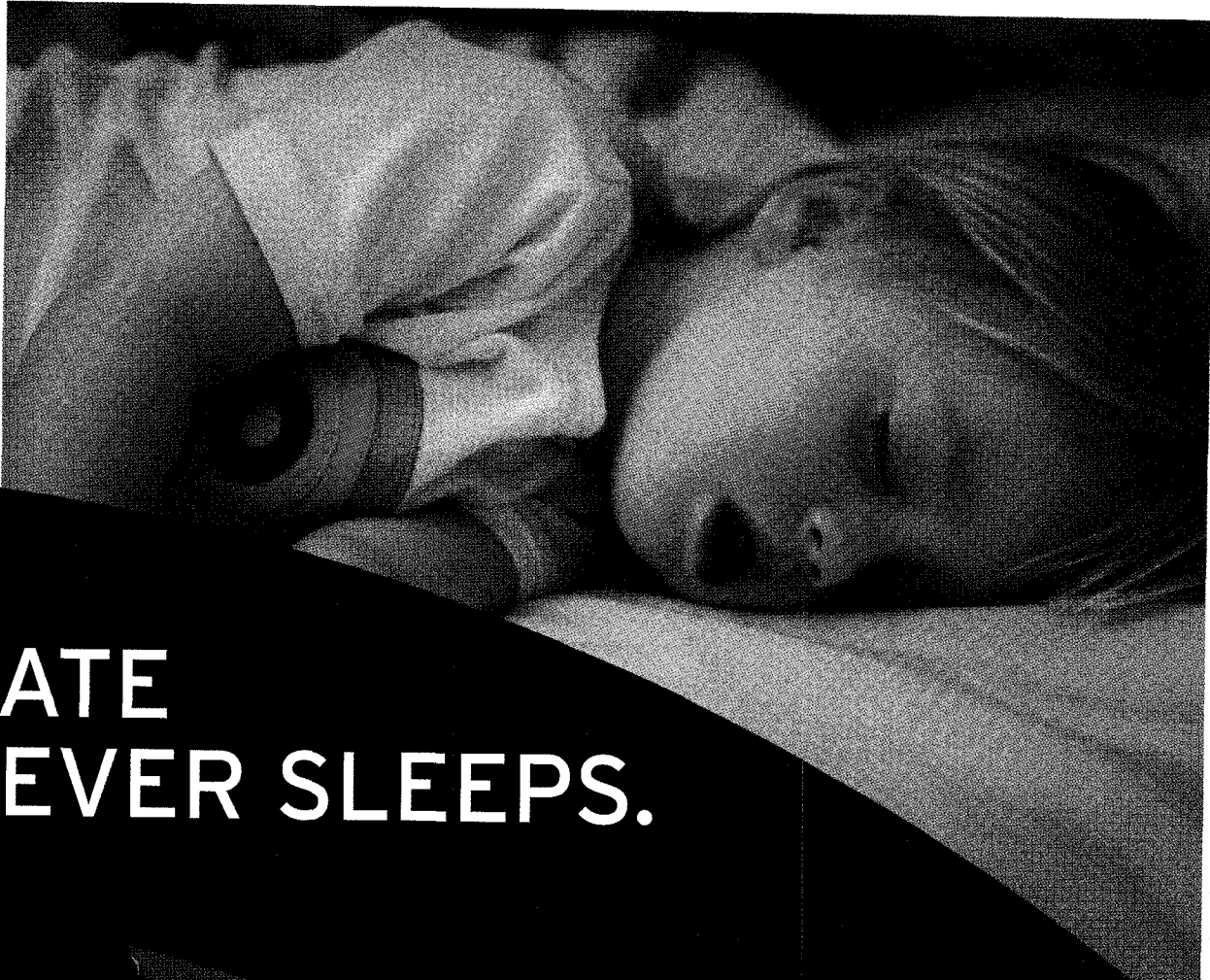
THE

JULY 21, 2008

NEW YORKER



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KATE NEVER SLEEPS.



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Dreams.

Realities.

After an evening of tantrums that shook the walls, Kate has finally begun to dream. >>> But down the hall, her father wonders how he'll afford to send her to college, while her mother considers a larger home. >>> Downtown, Kate's overworked pediatrician ponders an early retirement. >>> In Bentonville, a shipment of Kate's favorite peas arrives at the baby food bottling plant. >>> And in Sydney, a sing-along DVD is being filmed, one that'll provide Kate's grateful parents with a brand-new lullaby.

Every minute, Kate's world is being enhanced by those near and far. And every minute, Citi is helping. We're providing the college savings plan and the mortgage that'll give her family room to grow. We're enabling her doctor to plan for the future, helping the pea farmer and the food processor to reach new markets, and funding the Australian studio. It's an enormous undertaking. And an even bigger responsibility. Which is why, while Kate might sleep, we never do. citi.com/neversleeps

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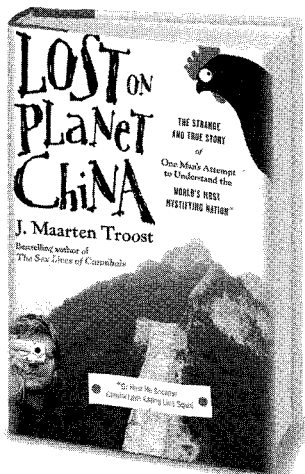


**Armchair
travel
that's just
the ticket.**

BWAY

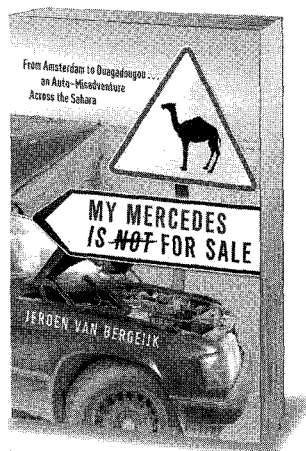


From China...

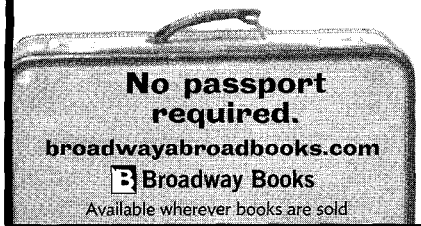


The bestselling author of *The Sex Lives of Cannibals* visits Chairman Mao (still dead), hikes up Tai Shan with eighty thousand of his nearest and dearest, and deciphers an authentic Chinese menu—cattle privates anyone?

...to Africa.



Buy a clunker of a car in Amsterdam and re-sell it in the Third World. What could go wrong? Plenty: active minefields, occasional banditry, breakdowns, and a slight military coup for starters.



THE NEW YORKER

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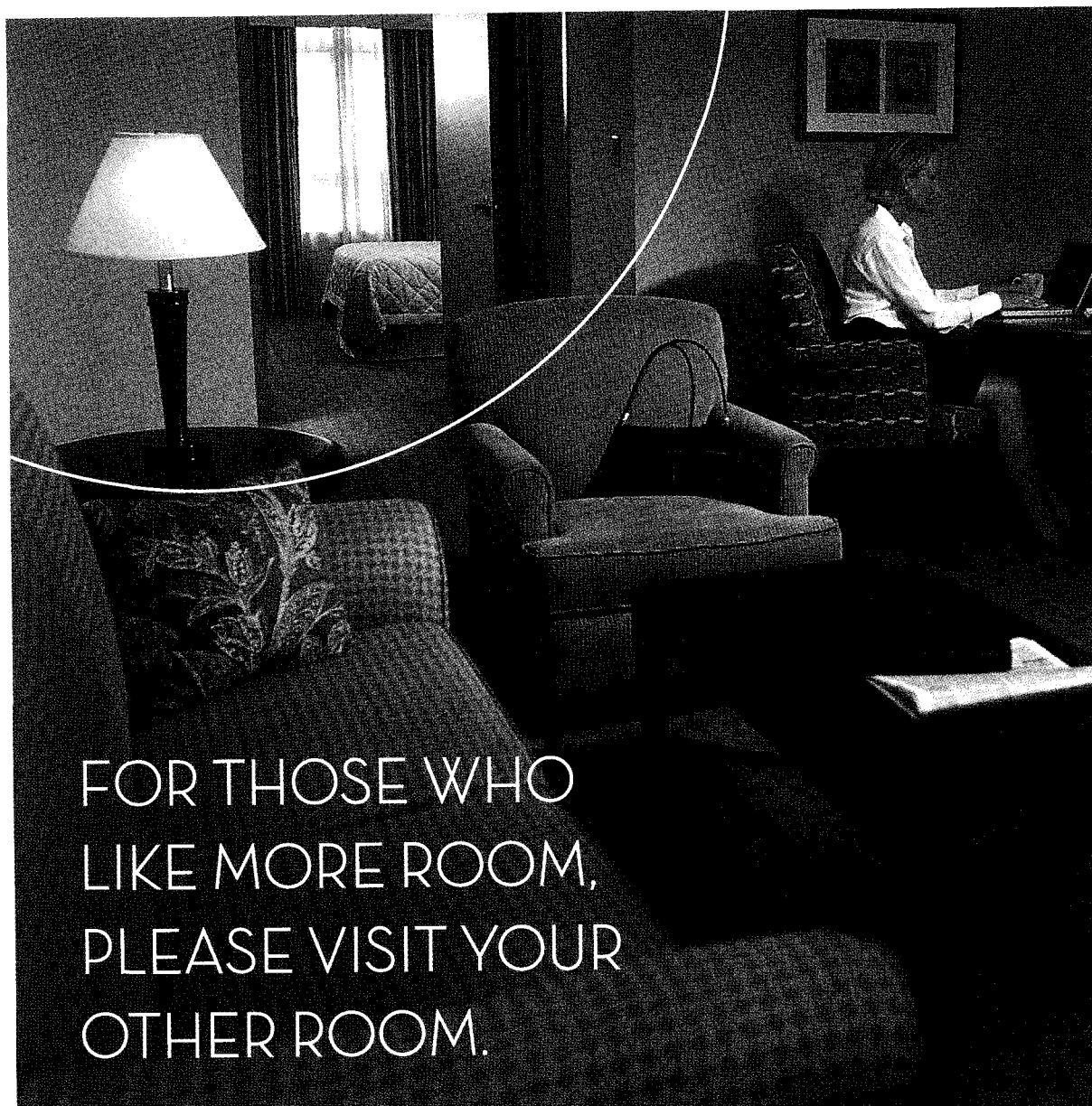
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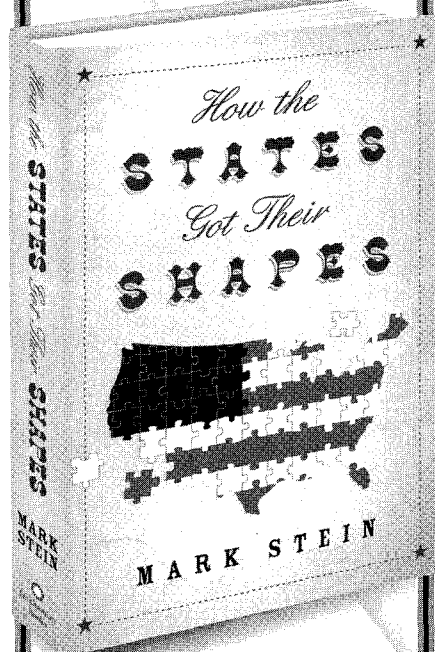
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Oklahoma have
that panhandle?**

**Did someone
make a mistake?**



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panhandles and notches,
the West Virginias
and Oklahomas."**

—*The Wall Street Journal*



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CONTRIBUTORS

Ryan Lizza ("Making It," p. 48) is a staff writer and the Washington correspondent for the magazine.

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 27), the author of "Politics: Observations & Arguments," writes frequently about politics and policy. He also writes a blog on newyorker.com.

Benjamin Wallace-Wells ("Surfing the Universe," p. 32) writes for the *Times Magazine* and is a national-affairs correspondent for *Rolling Stone*.

Rebecca Mead (The Talk of the Town, p. 29) has been a staff writer since 1997. She is the author of "One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding."

Yoni Brenner (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 39) is a screenwriter who lives in New York.

Patricia Marx ("Buy Shanghai," p. 40) has a children's book, "Dot in Larryland," with illustrations by Roz Chast, coming out in December.

Robert Bly (Poem, p. 51) has published, with the Islamic scholar Leonard Lewisohn, "The Angels Knocking on the Tavern Door," a new translation of the poems of the Persian poet Hafez.

Jill Lepore ("The Lion and the Mouse," p. 66) is a professor of history at Harvard and chair of the History and Literature Program. "Blindspot," her first novel, written with Jane Kamensky, is due out in December.

Marcus Jackson (Poem, p. 70) is working on his first collection of poems, "Neighborhood Register." His poetry has appeared in such publications as *The Evansville Review* and *Heliotrope*.

Sarah Shun-lien Bynum (Fiction, p. 74) has a new novel, "Ms. Hempel Chronicles," coming out in September. She directs the M.F.A. Program in Writing at the University of California San Diego.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Books, p. 82) is the author of "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change," which is available in paperback.

Barry Blitt (Cover), an artist and illustrator, is working on illustrations for a new children's book, "What's the Weather Inside?"

Ever Meulen (Spots) is an illustrator. "Verve," his eleventh book, is a compilation of his work from 1988 to 2005. He lives in Brussels.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Ask the Author: *Ryan Lizza* takes readers' questions about Obama and the election, and talks to *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *Jeffrey Toobin*, and *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Campaign Trail podcast. / *Jill Lepore* and *Roger Angell* discuss E.B. White and children's literature. / *Aleksandar Hemon* reads a Bernard Malamud story. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, and blogs by *George Packer* and *Sasha Frere-Jones*. / From the archives: *Larissa MacFarquhar* on Obama, *David Denby* on "Batman Begins." / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.



THE MAIL

COURTING CONTROVERSY

With his acerbic, painfully honest approach to news and, more tellingly, politics, Keith Olbermann is quite deserving of some media attention of his own ("One Angry Man," by Peter J. Boyer, June 23rd). It must take a tremendous sense of civic duty to put together a live broadcast such as "Count-down" five nights a week, particularly one that includes the kinds of indictments that Olbermann aims at a government that has traded on fear and distrust for so many years now. His Special Comment directed at Senator Hillary Clinton should only be taken as such; Olbermann has never claimed impartiality with these well-written diatribes, nor does he pretend to speak for anyone but himself, which is, I believe, part of what makes him so remarkable. I have never found any criticisms of Senator Clinton on "Count-down" to be either misogynistic or unfair. The Special Comments that have been directed at various members of the government over the past years have been like missiles: aimed carefully, well crafted, and usually, in my opinion, on target. Rare is the opportunity, in this politically correct environment, to listen to an intelligent, solid, and direct essay on the current state of affairs, and Olbermann has turned his venue into an art form.

*Danielle Goldfogel Holland
Littleton, Colo.*

Boyer has captured well Olbermann's in-your-face dogma. Olbermann's bombast masks his self-absorption, a behavioral style that is often pompous, parabolic, and paranoid, all at once. He purports to find truth in his shallow predispositions, reacting with impulsive verbal swipes at imagined adversaries and imposing senselessly juvenile labels on events that he cannot understand, let alone interpret. Pity MSNBC, which has installed a practitioner of neo-reactionary journalism. Seeing conspiracies everywhere, Olbermann liberally tosses shock grenades, hoping to disembowel

and find smut in the entrails of a complex political culture that eludes his intelligence. His commentaries depict only the low-grade rationality of a warped mind driven by vindictive, defensive, and falsely redemptive motives. Olbermann's endgame is himself; the costs to MSNBC might well come in the form of TV remotes everywhere, clicking to other channels.

*Robert Lockwood
Williamsburg, Va.*

THE ORIGINS OF PAINTING

Judith Thurman, in her piece on the French cave paintings at Chauvet, cites Pablo Picasso's visit to Lascaux, which was discovered in 1940 ("First Impressions," June 23rd). Decades before Picasso's encounter with Stone Age art, John Singer Sargent conveyed the same insight about cave painters and their invention of visual language through his famous painting "El Jaleo." Sargent first went to Spain in 1879, the year that cave paintings were discovered in Altamira. The painting contains a subtle but poignant homage to his Stone Age predecessors. He finished "El Jaleo" in his Paris studio in 1882, while the debate was still raging about the authenticity of cave paintings and their place in art history. "El Jaleo" features a flamenco dancer and the flickering shadow she casts against the wall of a dimly lit tavern. However, along the left part of the wall is a sepia drawing of an aurochs alongside a handprint. The inclusion of these details suggests that Sargent had perhaps intuited the prehistoric and ritualistic roots of European painting, music, and dance.

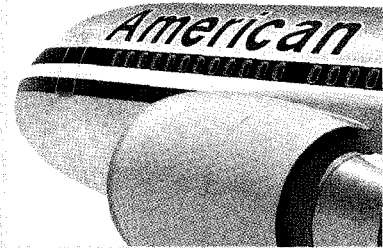
*Peter Eudenbach
Assistant Professor of Art
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Va.*

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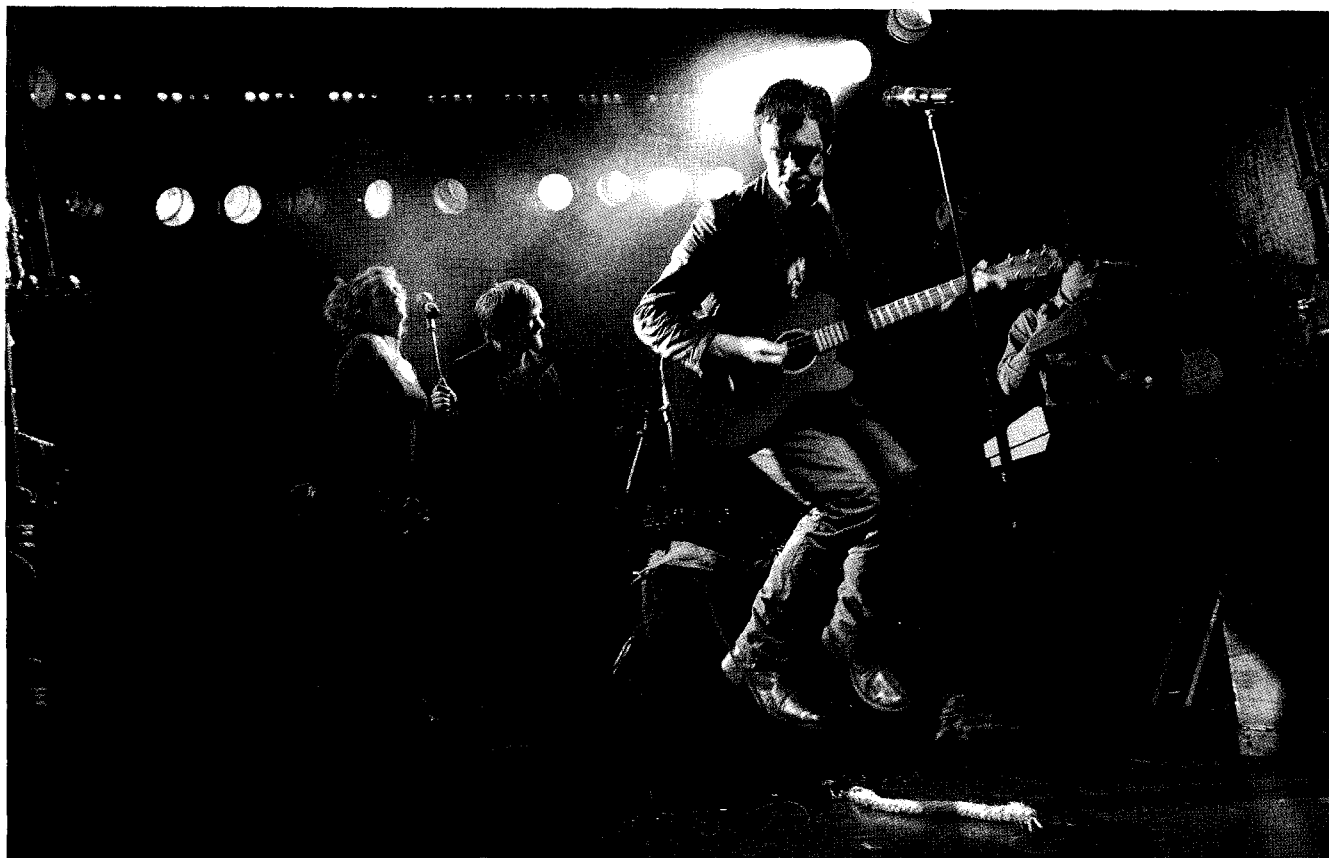
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
20	21	22	16	17	18	19

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE THEY'LL GO ON

The Lincoln Center Festival includes "Gate/Beckett," a series of one-man Beckett dramas that were not originally intended for the stage and are being presented by Dublin's Gate Theatre. The offerings include "Eh Joe," starring Liam Neeson and directed by Atom Egoyan; "I'll Go On," starring Barry McGovern; and "First Love," starring Ralph Fiennes. Next week (July 26-27), the festival will run a marathon of all three plays. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE GOOD AS GOLD

The Brooklyn-based singer Santi White, who records under the name Santogold, borrows from dub, punk, hip-hop, and beyond to make summery pop music that's good all year round. Santogold is about to tour with Coldplay, but she's appearing at SummerStage for free. (See page 10.)

ART INTO THE WILD

The exhibition "After Nature," at the New Museum, envisions a future world in which humanity and the environment have

fallen into ruin. More than ninety works—from delirious animated films by Nathalie Djurberg to totemic sculptures by Huma Bhabha—sprawl across three floors of the museum. (See page 11.)

MOVIES MAN OF WAR

Between 1959 and 1961, the Japanese director Masaki Kobayashi, who had spent six miserable years in the Japanese Army during the Second World War and had, on principle, refused promotion, made the nearly ten-hour-long film "The Human Condition," which

details the brutality endured by a conscript in Manchuria. Film Forum is presenting it in three parts. (See page 20.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND THE BID PAYBACK

Sotheby's has closed down for the summer, but Christie's has barrelled on with a succession of pop-culture auctions. The next is an offering of clothing, furniture, photographs, and memorabilia that once belonged to James Brown. (See page 22.)

Jollyship the Whiz-Bang, at Ars Nova. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK JUST SAY YAZ

Called Yazoo in England—
and Yaz over here—

Vince Clarke and Alison Moyet were a duo only from 1982 to 1983, just enough time for them to score three dance hits ("Don't Go," "Situation," and "Nobody's Diary") that, by themselves,



justify the existence of Eighties Nights. Clarke played the music, Moyet sang, and the two evidently said very little to each other when they were a band. Just as he had been during his brief time in Depeche Mode, Clarke was the slight, androgynous blond-haired boy in the back, rarely looking up. Moyet was the husky-voiced singer who dominated the whole enterprise, making her gender simultaneously irrelevant and the point of every song. While Clarke's tracks were models of efficient digital pop, Moyet was gloriously human, singing in the tradition of overwhelming dance divas like Gloria Gaynor and Patti LaBelle. When the band arrives in New York for reunion shows this week at Terminal 5 and the Beacon Theatre, expect equal amounts of frat and fierce on the dance floor.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ANIMALS OUT OF PAPER

Second Stage's Uptown Series concludes with this play by Rajiv Joseph, an origami-themed love story. Giovanna Sardelli directs. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS

Irish Rep and the Cincinnati Playhouse present Mark Brown's stage adaptation of the Jules Verne novel, set in 1872, about a British man who travels the globe to win a bet. In previews. Opens July 20. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

BUFFALO GAL

Primary Stages opens its season with this play by A. R. Gurney, a comedy about a fading television star who returns to her home town of Buffalo to perform in "The Cherry Orchard." Mark Lamos directs. Previews begin July 22. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE CURSE OF CAPISTRANO—EL ZORRO!

Adapted and directed by Ted Minos from Johnston McCulley's novella, an adventure set in 1820 in California, about El Zorro, an outlaw who fights government oppression. An Inwood Shakespeare Festival production. Opens July 16. (Inwood Hill Park Peninsula, enter at 218th St. at Indian Rd. 917-918-0394.)

EXPATRIATE

Lenelle Moise wrote this two-woman play with music, about black American performing artists who move to France in an effort to escape racist limitations. Tamilla Woodard directs. Moise and Karla Mosley star. Opens July 16. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

FLAMINGO COURT

Jamie Farr and Anita Gillette star in this comedy by Luigi Createore, about the residents of a South Florida condo. Steven Yuhasz directs. Previews begin July 17. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

GATE/BECKETT

As part of the Lincoln Center Festival, Dublin's Gate Theatre presents three one-man dramas by Samuel Beckett: "Eh Joe," starring Liam Neeson and directed by Atom Egoyan; "I'll Go On," starring Barry McGovern and directed by Colm O'Brian; and "First Love," starring Ralph Fiennes and directed by Michael Colgan. Opens July 16. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre at John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-721-6500.)

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE ROCK MUSICAL

Diane Paulus directs a cast of twenty-seven, led by Jonathan Groff ("Spring Awakening") and Will Swenson, following the success of the concert production last summer. Previews begin July 22. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

SOME AMERICANS ABROAD

Second Stage revives Richard Nelson's comedy from 1989, about a group of American college students who travel to England with their professors. Anthony Rapp and Tom Cavanagh are part of the ensemble cast. Gordon Edelstein directs. In previews. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

STAIN

Tony Glazer wrote this dark comedy, about the life and relationships of a fifteen-year-old boy. Scott C. Emblar directs. In previews. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

33RD ANNUAL SAMUEL FRENCH INC. OFF-OFF BROADWAY SHORT PLAY FESTIVAL

The oldest short-play festival in Manhattan selects forty plays by new playwrights, judged by a panel that includes Kathleen Clark, Israel Horowitz, Eduardo Machado, and Thomas Bradshaw. July 15-20. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

[TITLE OF SHOW]

Jeff Bowen and Hunter Bell's musical about writing a musical, which premiered at the New York

Musical Theatre Festival in 2004 and later played at the Vineyard, comes to Broadway. The original cast includes Bowen, Bell, Susan Blackwell, Heidi Blickenstaff, and Larry Pressgrove. Michael Berresse directs. In previews. Opens July 17. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TWELVE OPHELIAS

Woodshed Collective presents Caridad Svich's play, a reinterpretation of "Hamlet," at the McCarren Park Pool. In previews. (Lorimer St. at Bayard St., Brooklyn. Tickets, which are free, may be reserved at www.theatermania.com.)

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HATE ALL YOUR FRIENDS

Four Chairs Theatre Company presents the premiere of Larry Kunofsky's comedy, about a misanthropic man who becomes involved with a woman who runs a secret club. Jacob Krueger directs. Previews begin July 19. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

ARIAS WITH A TWIST

As show-business survivors go, few are as graceful or as funny as the drag artist and singer Joey Arias. He's a clown, but, like all great clowns, he takes his technique seriously enough to not only control the joke but also make himself the proud brunt of it. In his fast and fascinating new show, conceived with the master puppeteer Basil Twist, Arias has been abducted by aliens, who admire his bustier-clad, high-heeled form. Soon, Arias is released into a kind of psychedelic rain forest, where he eats mushrooms, talks to the audience about his sex life, and performs a ballad. He then reverts to what he has always been: a chanteuse whose side splits and potty mouth may keep him out of the Rainbow Room but will forever win him a place in our hearts. (Reviewed in our issue of 7/7 & 14/08.) (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

DAMN YANKEES

"Encores! Summer Stars" revives the classic 1955 musical about Joe Boyd (P. J. Benjamin), the Faustian real-estate man and diehard Washington Senators fan, who sells his soul to the Devil (Sean Hayes) in order to keep his favorite team from losing to the Yankees. The show hasn't aged particularly well, but as a museum piece it's as lovable as it's ever been. Cheyenne Jackson, as Boyd's alter ego, is particularly easy on the eyes and ears, and Hayes does a brilliant job of making the crowd-pleasing role his own, but M.V.P. might go to Randy Graff, whose mellifluous alto breathes new life into the role of Mrs. Boyd. Jane Krakowski, as the bubbly temptress Lola, famous for getting what she wants, certainly looks and acts the part with verve, but, for a role more or less written for the legendary Gwen Verdon, one wonders why they didn't cast a stronger dancer. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

EAST TO EDINBURGH FESTIVAL

At 59E59, the fifth annual festival presents works on their way to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

JOLLYSHIP THE WHIZ-BANG

Irreverent punk perfection, care of Nick Jones and Raja Azar. Jones is both the front man of this swarthy human-and-puppet band and the voice of Captain Clamp, pirate extraordinaire, who looks like a green-faced cousin of Lady Elaine, from "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Directed by Sam Gold, the troupe serves up deconstructed comic bits punctuated by ecstatic rock songs with titles like "I Killed the Cabin Boy." If you've never seen a puppet do a keg stand, climb aboard. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444. Through July 20.)

KICKING A DEAD HORSE

Sam Shepard wrote and directs this play, about a successful art dealer who wants to escape to the American West. Stephen Rea stars. Co-produced by the Abbey Theatre, in Dublin. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

LIFE IN A MARITAL INSTITUTION

James Braly's wry hour-long monologue—at SoHo Playhouse, transferred following its run at 59E59

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earlier this year—interweaves the story of his twenty-year marriage with scenes from a hospice, where his sister is preparing to marry her ne'er-do-well boyfriend before she dies. The juxtaposition reveals a lifetime of relationship mayhem, and Braly presents it winningly, with a keen sense of the absurdity of everyone's eccentricities. Yet while Braly is free with embarrassing details he's less comfortable with introspection; he's happy to share his horror about his wife's freezing their son's placenta and her breast-feeding their four- and six-year-old boys, but how he ended up in such a situation remains mysterious to the audience, and, perhaps, to Braly himself. Directed by Hal Brooks. (15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO

Roundabout Theatre Company presents Christopher Durang's dark comedy from 1985, about his parents' long history of alcoholism and nervous breakdowns. Walter Bobbie directs. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

NEAL MEDLYN'S UNPRONOUNCEABLE SYMBOL

The world premiere of a pop opera made up of Prince songs, by Medlyn and Kenny Mellman ("Kiki and Herb"). (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through July 20.)

PERFECT HARMONY

This comedy, written by Andrew Grosso and the Essentials, about two competing high-school a cappella teams, ran in the 2006 New York Fringe Festival. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

POTOMAC THEATRE PROJECT

The company's season includes Howard Barker's "Scenes from an Execution," starring Jan Maxwell, Neal Bell's "Somewhere in the Pacific," and Sarah Kane's "Crave," in repertory. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

SUMMER PLAY FESTIVAL

The Public and the Living Room for Artists join forces to present the fifth annual festival of new works, including Stephen Brown's "Future Me," directed by Joanna Settle, with music by Stew. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

OUT OF TOWN

BARD SUMMERSCAPE

The Spiegeltent returns, while Peter Dinklage stars in Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya," in a modern-dress version translated by Paul Schmidt, directed by Erica Schmidt, through July 20. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

BAY STREET THEATRE

Alex Timbers directs Christopher Durang's "Beyond Therapy," starring Kate Burton, Katie Finneran, and Darrell Hammond. For more information, visit www.baystreet.org. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL

Matthew Wilkas and Mark Setlock's satire on children's beauty pageants, "Pageant Play," is staged at the Unicorn. On the Main Stage, Karen Zacarias's comedy "The Book Club Play" closes July 19. Beginning July 22, Richard Corley directs "A Man for All Seasons," Robert Bolt's drama about Sir Thomas More. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

"Cymbeline," directed by Terrence O'Brien, plays on the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, in repertory with "Twelfth Night." For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL

On the Nikos Stage, the world premiere of a drama by Nathan Louis Jackson, "Broke-ology," directed by Thomas Kail ("In the Heights"), closes July 20. On the Main Stage, Michael Greif directs "Three Sisters," translated by Paul Schmidt, and starring Jessica Hecht, Roberta Maxwell, and Manoel Felciano. For a full festival schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

ADDING MACHINE: Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. Through July 20. **AU-**

GUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **CIRQUE DREAMS "JUNGLE FANTASY":** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE COUNTRY GIRL:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through July 20. **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY DANCES WITH THE STARS!:** 47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **PASSING STRANGE:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THURGOOD:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—July 17: Greg Brown, a bona-fide American songwriting treasure, works to expand the scope of traditional roots music (he once devoted an entire album to William Blake's poetry). July 22: Dave Mason, British rock royalty, acted as a foil to Steve Winwood and Jim Capaldi in the legendary jazz-rock ensemble Traffic.

BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—July 19: The reunion of the beloved synth-pop duo Yaz (known as Yazoo in their native England).

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!

Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—July 17: The Dobro virtuoso Jerry Douglas, an important member of Alison Krauss's band, Union Station, splits the bill with the Holmes Brothers, the long-running blues, soul, gospel, R. & B., and country act. July 18: Deerhoof, the San Francisco rock band known for its free-jazz abandon and its ability to stomp genres like Godzilla crushed cities, shares the stage with Metropolis Ensemble (see Classical—(Le) Poisson Rouge). The pairing is the work of Ronen Givony, whose "Wordless Music" events specialize in unlikely juxtapositions. July 19: A screening of Bruce Lee's "Enter the Dragon," accompanied by a new live score performed by the d.j. Karsh Kale and his band. The taiko drumming group Soh Daiko will set the stage. July 20: The Gypsy rockers Golem, the street-savvy reggae of Israel's Soulico, and other globe-trotting sounds.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE

Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—July 19: An afternoon of gospel music with Marvin Sapp, Hezekiah Walker, Dorinda Clark-Cole, and Kurt Carr. July 20: Santogold, a.k.a. the singer Santi White. With the deep bass beats of the Philadelphia d.j. Diplo and the Montreal-based turntablist A-Track, who has performed with Kanye West.

DROM

85 Avenue A (212-777-1157)—July 16: The stellar Serbian brass band Boban i Marko Markovic Orkestar faces off with the local toughs in Frank London's Klezmer Brass All Stars. July 22: The tabla player Suphala, who studied under the masters Ustad Alla Rakha and Ustad Zakir Hussain, takes her instrument deep into the pop realm.

MCCARREN PARK POOL

Lorimer St. between Bayard St. and Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (212-307-7171)—July 17: DJ Shadow and Cut Chemist create entrancing soundscapes from snippets of old funk and soul records. For their show "The Hard Sell," they're using innumerable 45s, eight turntables, and a pair of guitar-loop pedals.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING

The dancing under the stars at Lincoln Center continues, with the action taking place not on Fountain Plaza, the traditional location, which is a sea of construction owing to the center's ongoing renovations, but rather in nearby Damrosch Park. There's still a dance floor, though, and lessons preceding the shows. July 16: Boban i Marko Markovic Orkestar (see Drom). July 17: The Argentinean ensemble Orquesta Típica Imperial delights tango dancers with its U.S. debut. July 18: Soul and Afro-pop with the Budos Band and Chico Mann, an offshoot of Antibalas. July 19: Top-shelf Cuban son with the vocalist Albita. July 22: The jazz singer Mary Stallings gets support from the Harlem Renaissance Orchestra, in an evening that includes a special tribute to the late saxophonist Illinois Jacquet, a Midsummer Night Swing regular. (For more information, visit www.lincolncenter.org. Through July 26.)

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—July 21: In the mid-nineties, as the leader of the long-running English band Pulp, the gangly singer Jarvis Cocker lent an air of sophisticated humility to the hubris-laden Brit-pop era. Touching on awkward romantic foibles and class conflict, his wry lyrics defined a decidedly English social malaise. Cocker's solo career is still marked by his distinctive, bookish charm.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE

158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—This new club is the brainchild of the cellist Justin Kantor and the violinist and composer David Handler. The two, who met at the Manhattan School of Music, could become the Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager of the music scene: they have a swank spot where up to eight hundred patrons can enjoy a wide variety of classical, rock, jazz, and world-music programs. The booking is being handled by Ronen Givony, the creator of the series "Wordless Music" (see Celebrate Brooklyn!), and Brice Rosenbloom, who used to work for the Knitting Factory and has since established himself as an independent promoter of great imagination and verve. July 18-19: The San Francisco duo Matmos. The electronic explorers, known for their sampling skills and elaborate concept albums, have used nothing but synthesizers for their new record, "Supreme Balloon," a sonic kaleidoscope of solid-state sounds. July 18: Brazzaville is led by the guitarist and singer David Brown, an old friend and sideman of Beck's. The group started out in the Los Angeles coffee-house scene of the nineties, but it is now based in Barcelona. They traffic in sophisticated pop in which languid bossa-nova-influenced rhythms and gritty lyrics conjure dark deeds on steamy dead-end streets. (For more Poisson Rouge listings, see Classical Music.)

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL

July 16: The British reggae group Steel Pulse, which rose to prominence at the same time as the Clash, in the late seventies, retains the fiery passion and social consciousness of its early days. (Rockefeller Park, Battery Park City.) July 17: Ted Leo and the Pharmacists. Leo, a true hero of the underground, writes songs packed with insightful lyrics, which he leavens with aggressive guitar work and poignant vocalizing. (Castle Clinton, Battery Park.) (For more information, visit www.rivertorivernyc.com.)

SHEA STADIUM

Flushing, Queens (212-307-7171)—In 1957, the Dodgers left Brooklyn, and Mayor Robert F. Wagner put a local lawyer and power broker, William A. Shea, in charge of bringing another baseball team to the city. Shea's ideas included building a new stadium, but he failed to persuade any of the existing teams to move. So he came up with a league of his own, the Continental League, which was headed by Branch Rickey, the Dodgers executive who had broken the color bar by signing Jackie Robinson. The Continental League was short-lived (and it disbanded without a single game being played), but it helped push the

big leagues to expand. The Mets arrived in 1962. A new stadium was completed in 1964, and it was named in Shea's honor. Next year, the team is moving to a new facility, and Shea Stadium will be no more. The Mets aren't the only ones to have played here. The Jets called it home from 1964 to 1983 (as did the Yankees, in 1974-75, during the reconstruction of their stadium). O. J. Simpson set his single-season rushing record of two thousand and three yards on its turf in 1973. Musical history was made when the Beatles invaded, in 1965. The Police, Eric Clapton, Elton John, and others followed over the years. On July 16 and July 18, Billy Joel becomes the last pop star to grace its grounds.

SIREN MUSIC FESTIVAL

This year's version of the annual indie-rock gathering in Coney Island features **Stephen Malkmus** (a sort of elder statesman of the genre thanks to his work with Pavement) and his latest rollicking band, the **Jicks**, along with the sprawling Canadian collective **Broken Social Scene**, which favors lush and complex music. Also on the bill for the daylong affair: the **Helio Sequence**, **Beach House**, **Times New Viking**, **Jaguar Love**, the **Dodos**, **Annals**, **Film School**, **Parts & Labor**, **Dragons of Zynth**, and many others. (For more information, visit www.villagevoice.com/siren. July 19.)

TERMINAL 5

610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—July 16-17: **Yaz** (see the Beacon Theatre). July 22: **Jarvis Cocker** (see Music Hall of Williamsburg).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—July 16-19: Living in the shadow of a legend like **Lucille Ball** can't be easy, but her daughter, **Lucie Arnaz**, has, over forty years, carved out a respected career as a singer and an actress. July 22: The **David Berger** octet features the guest saxophonists **Harry Allen**, a Getz-inspired tenorist, and **Joe Temperley**, a majestic Carney-infused baritonist. The group is celebrating the release of its new CD, "I Had the Craziest Dream: The Music of Harry Warren." Later that night and Tuesdays in July and August, **Berger** is in residence with his big band, the **Sultans of Swing**.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—July 15-20: For thirty years, the flügelhornist **Chuck Mangione** has been making sure that it feels so good.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—July 15-20: **Marcus Roberts** keeps the sweeping history of jazz piano at his fingertips. His hand-in-glove rhythm team consists of **Roland Guerin** on bass and **Jason Marsalis** on drums.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—July 17-20: When the clarinetist **Don Byron** recently investigated the music of the Motown legend **Junior Walker**, he turned to Walker's instrument of choice, the tenor saxophone. Byron's 2006 tribute album, "Do the Boomerang," is brightened by the enthusiasm he brings to all of his off-the-map projects. July 21: The pianist **JoAnne Brackeen** pays tribute to three mighty former employers: **Art Blakey**, **Joe Henderson**, and **Stan Getz**. Her quintet is fleshed out in style by the saxophonist **Javon Jackson** and the trumpeter **Jeremy Pelt**.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—July 15-20: Fresh from a triumphant solo performance at the JVC Jazz festival, the ever-iconoclastic pianist **Cecil Taylor** is joined by another innovator of note, the British drummer **Tony Oxley**, for a week of duets. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"J.M.W. Turner." Through Sept. 1. ♦ "Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pierre Dure from the Palaces of Europe." Through Sept. 21. ♦ "Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy." Through Sept. 1. ♦ "Medieval and Renaissance Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum." Through Aug. 17. ♦ "Framing a Century: Master Photographs, 1840-1940."



Pepe Villegas's "Sears Tower, 1997," at Cowles.

Through Sept. 1. ♦ "Jeff Koons on the Roof." Through Oct. 26. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Dalí: Painting and Film." Through Sept. 15. ♦ "Bernd and Hilla Becher: Landscape/Topology." Through Aug. 25. ♦ "Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling." Opens July 20. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—A tremendous steel spider opens "Louise Bourgeois," a tour through six decades of sculpture, painting, drawing, installation, and filmed performance by the French-born, New York-based artist. Paintings from the forties presage the stacked totemic assemblages of the fifties, which segue to phallic carved marbles, tuberos bronzes, enclosed "Cells," and stitched-fabric objects. Bourgeois's approach has become more precise over the years, as raw anger has ceded ground to fierce intellect. Her depictions of the muscle and blood beneath the skin of domestic life, her idiosyncratic lexicon, and her ability to elicit a visceral reaction sharpen as one ascends the chronologically arranged spiral. Bourgeois's work is feminine, tough, and confrontational (if it were an actress, it would be **Barbara Stanwyck** or **Bette Davis**). Power and honesty trump sentiment at every turn,

often to skin-crawling effect. Take that arachnid in the lobby: it's a symbol of the mother she loved, but all angles and edges and big enough to devour those who stand beneath it. Through Sept. 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—"Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe." Through Sept. 21. ♦ "Paul McCarthy: Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement." Through Oct. 12. ♦ "Polaroids: Mapplethorpe." Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End." Through Oct. 19. ♦ "Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition." Through Aug. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"The Horse." Through Jan. 4, 2009. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY

Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—"Ardeshtir Mohassess: Art and Satire in Iran." Through Aug. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—"How Soon Is Now?" An alternate title for this show of works by participants in the museum's 2008 Artists in the Marketplace program might be: "How Unorthodox Are My Materials?" Sculpture is crafted from medical supplies (**Michelle Frick**'s scatter installation) and computer motherboards (**Mark Stafford**'s wall-mounted piece). Photographs incorporate obsolete techniques (**Keliy Anderson-Staley**'s collodion on tintype portraits, **Brendan Carroll**'s "fictitious portrait" of Jersey City, New Jersey, executed in Polaroids). What looks like a painting, by **Cosme Herrera**, is actually made out of wood. The most outré materials are dispensed by **Risa Puno**'s vending machine: tubes of homemade lip balm in such flavors as butter, macaroni and cheese, and s'mores. Through Aug. 18. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL

CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—"Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan." Through Sept. 7. ♦ "Bill Wood's Business." Through Sept. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—"Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976." Through Sept. 21. ♦ "Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered." Through Aug. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"Philip Guston: Works on Paper." Through Aug. 31. ♦ "Illuminating the Medieval Hunt." Through Aug. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—"The 183rd Annual." Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM

235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—"After Nature." Opens July 17. ♦ "Altoids Award: Ei Arakawa, Lauren Kelley, Michael Patterson-

Carver, and Michael Stickrod." Through Oct. 12. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—"Eminent Domain: Contemporary Photography and the City," an exhibition of work about New York taken primarily from the library's own collection, is appealingly uneven. Go for Zoe Leonard's pictures of storefronts and shop displays on the Lower East Side—funky instant classics in the Walker Evans mode—and discover Ethan Levitas's panoramas of elevated subway trains and their passengers, Reiner Leist's grid of views

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

BURT BARR

Each work in the veteran video artist's current show has been pared down to one or two effects. A frog glides through illuminated water. A gun, pointed at the viewer, fires. A donkey figurine, drenched by a nocturnal rainstorm, is only fully decipherable in flashes of light. Shooting in black-and-white, Barr reduces each little scene to a potent moment of dramatic poetry. Two videos featuring dancers doing very little—one is the artist's

TABLES FOR TWO

BLUE RIBBON DOWNING STREET BAR



34 Downing St. (212-691-0404)—On a recent night at this West Village spot, a young woman—blond hair, petite, ebulliently extolling her recent wine-tasting course—sampled a glass of red. "Is it a Californian Syrah?" she asked her companion. The bartender began to offer a hint. "No!" she shrieked. "I'm trying to figure it out!" This tiny, wood-paneled bar attracts both wine snobs and wine neophytes, affectionate couples and solo sippers, and the bartenders convey their knowledge with enthusiasm rather than superiority. "That Chenin Blanc has a pedigree," one shared the other evening. "It's produced by one of the Chenin Blanc masters, who makes just a very small batch."

The woman swirled her wine vigorously, holding it to the light. "Is it a Pinot from Oregon?" There's a small galley kitchen in the back (much of the prep work is done across the street, at Blue Ribbon Bakery), which produces simple, satisfying dishes: delicate, deconstructed lobster cocktail; curried-goat sliders with a red-pepper aioli that resembles melted Velveta but tastes nothing like it. An egg-on-egg shooter—hard-boiled, topped with smoked trout and trout roe, with a slathering of crème fraîche—is dense and creamy; slabs of toast

are topped with slivers of Manchego and soaked with honey. A recent special of braised pork belly, that unavoidable favorite of chefs, was treated with a slightly sweet sour-plum sauce, offset by a supremely spicy cabbage slaw.

The taster stuck her nose deep into the glass, noisily inhaled, and took another sip: "Could it be a Merlot from New York? I mean, I'm pretty sure it's domestic." The last bite of the evening might be the best: strawberry toast, drizzled with rich hot fudge and Mexican honey, sticky, sweet, acidic. And as pedigreed as the wine. "The chef at the Blue Ribbon on Sullivan—his family owns the hives that produce the honey," the bartender noted. "We're the only ones that import it. They've got several varieties—avocado blossom, autumnal blossom. They used to sell it to a German cosmetic company, until the owner tasted it one day and was like, 'This is good!'" Speaking of varieties, do we have a final answer? The bartender broke the news: "It was a Cab Franc from Long Island." The woman bounced on her seat and smiled broadly. "I was so close!" (Open daily for dinner. Entrées \$18-\$28.)

—Andrea Thompson

from a window in lower Manhattan, and Thomas Holton's deft portrait of a family in Chinatown, which incorporates the children's brilliant little Polaroids. Tying it all together, Glenn Ligon contributes one text panel for each apartment he has occupied in the city, telling a winning story that any New Yorker can relate to. Through Aug. 29. (Open Mondays and Thursdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—"Arctic Hysteria: New Art from Finland." Through Sept. 15. ♦ "Public Farm One." Through Sept. 8. ♦ "James Turrell's Meeting." The artist's "skyspace" installation will be open at sunset on Saturdays. Through Sept. 6. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER

44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—"Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s." Through July 28. ♦ "Michael Portnoy: Casino linx." Through July 28. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—"Kehinde Wiley: The World Stage: Africa, Lagos ~ Dakar." Opens July 16. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

wife, the legendary Trisha Brown—suggest an overarching theme: all movement, when isolated, recorded, and repeated, becomes performance. Through July 25. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

TETSUMI KUDO

Those who have never heard of the Japanese artist Kudo (1935-1990)—which is to say almost everyone—are in for a treat. The assemblages here, made between 1965 and 1987, look startlingly fresh. Kudo lived in Paris from 1963 to 1988, and his eccentric style fuses East and West—the satirical psychedelia of Yayoi Kusama crossed with the gristly mysticism of Paul Thek. Phallus-like forms daubed with electric color sprout from buckets of dirt; Day-Glo birdcages burst with skeletal fingers, glass eyeballs, feathers, tufts of hair, shells, and snarled reel-to-reel tape. It's all insanely festive, as befits a danse macabre. Through Aug. 15. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

PAOLO PELLEGRIN

A great photojournalist's work often looks more at home on the magazine page than it does on a wall, and the modest size of most prints here signals a certain ambivalence on Pellegrin's part about the gallery context. But like Gilles Peress and Luc Delahaye, Pellegrin makes pictures that transcend category and deserve whatever showcase they can command. The biggest image in the show, a frieze-like portrait of preteen gangsters in Haiti, hangs across from—and is quietly re-

buffed by—a grid of nine mourners at the wake of Pope John Paul II. The impressionistic works in between touch down in Kosovo, Pakistan, Phnom Penh, Angola, and the Gaza Strip. Through July 18. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

W. EUGENE SMITH

Famous for his Second World War reportage and his subsequent photo-essays in *Life* magazine, Smith (1918-1978) helped define the role of the committed photojournalist. This savvy, wide-ranging exhibition is a chance to see extraordinary vintage prints of some of his best-known images alongside less familiar work (including portraits of Frank Sinatra and Bob Dylan). Fifteen pictures from the 1950 sequence known as "Spanish Village" form a show within the show and serve as a primer on the dramatic possibilities of black-and-white. Excerpts from other photo-essays—on Pittsburgh, Albert Schweitzer, the Ku Klux Klan, and the effects of mercury poisoning on a Japanese fishing village—whet the appetite for a thorough retrospective. Through Aug. 1. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

"ARTISTS SEE ARTISTS"

The subjects of this choice collection of portraits include Picasso, Miró, Giacometti, and Otto Dix, and many of the photographers are just as famous. But the celebrity of the sitters is less impressive than the quality of the images gathered here, which range from Victor Brauner's original collage for a Surrealist *Who's Who* to Robert Frank's filmstrip montages of Allen Ginsberg and William F. Buckley. Look for self-portraits by John Gutmann, Trude Fleischmann, and Edgar Degas, and don't miss four marvellously mannered compositions from the thirties by Peter Rose Pulham, an English photographer ripe for rediscovery. Through July 19. (Bell, 511 W. 25th St. 212-691-3883.)

"NOT SO SUBTLE SUBTITLE"

After a turn in the Whitney Biennial and a recent solo show at Petzel, Matthew Brannon curates an exhibition that could double as a user's guide for his own work. The spare, graphic styliness of his letterpress prints is seen in works by Robert Ashley, Christopher Williams, Tom Burr, Matthew Higgs, and Sarah Morris; his sly, self-penned tongue-in-cheek texts are echoed by Matthew Cerletty, Matt Keegan, and Sharon Ebner; and his cryptic visual poeticism is similar to that of Eileen Quinlan, Michell Elzay, and John Stezaker (and to the conceptual poetics of Jack Goldstein's suite of seven-inch records with sound effects like "three felled trees" and "the lost ocean liner"). A handsome booklet with writings by Isabelle Graw, Bret Easton Ellis, and Liam Gillick further collapses—as Brannon's own work does—the distinctions between art and design, poetry and prose. Through Aug. 1. (Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335.)

Short List

FIA BACKSTRÖM: White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212. Through July 26. **HARRY DODGE AND STANYA KAHN:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through Aug. 2. **PAUL FUSCO:** Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778. Through July 31. **PEPE VILLEGAS:** Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 212-741-8999. Through Aug. 22. **JANE AND LOUISE WILSON:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Aug. 2. **"IDLE YOUTH":** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Aug. 15. **"PAINTING NOW AND FOREVER, PART II":** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770; Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0020. Through Aug. 15. **"SOME THING ELSE":** Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6054. Through Aug. 1.

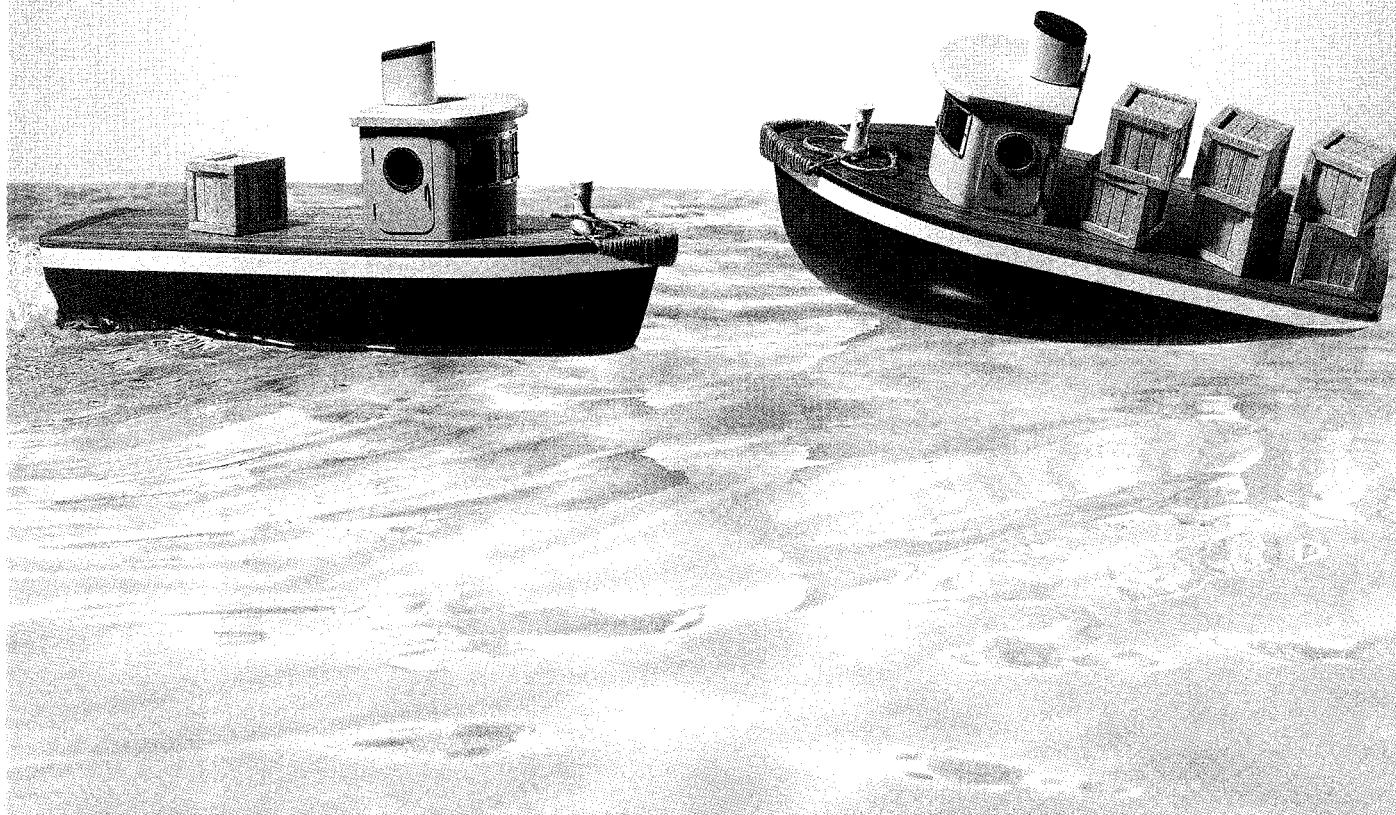
GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

VITO ACCONCI / SUSAN HEFUNA

Notes and documents from Acconci's (literally) seminal performance "Seedbed" and his furniture made from fluorescent tubes inaugurate a new SoHo gallery. An endgame of body art, "Seed-

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bed" (1972) involved the artist's lying under a platform and masturbating while visitors walked overhead. ("The goal of my activity," a typed document explains here, "is the production of seed.") The German-Egyptian artist Hefuna's work is considerably less salacious. Photographs and a video use Cairo as a backdrop, and her versions of the traditional Arabic meshrebeeyeh, carved wooden window enclosures, feature saccharine aphorisms, visible in the latticework, including "Knowledge is sweeter than honey." Through Aug. 1. (Albion, 102 Prince St. 212-343-3959.)

JEAN SHIN

Shin wraps audiotape around the gallery's central columns and prints musical scores on the edges of embroidered pieces of fabric, conceptually fusing the optical and the aural. But a video that offers only scant visual information is far more compelling. What appears to be a moving image of an abstract monochrome field is in fact an extreme closeup of a conductor's back while he's leading an orchestra. Recognition dawns slowly, as undulations of light and shadow—creases in the fabric of the maestro's jacket—correspond with uncanny accuracy to the musical shifts. Through July 26. (Location One, 26 Greene St. 212-334-3347.)

Short List

FRANCISCO DE GOYA: Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441. Through Aug. 1. **"NO WAVE":** KS Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918. Through July 31. **"PRETTY UGLY":** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258; Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977. Through Aug. 29.

DANCE

PILOBOLUS

The company continues its annual residency at the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 15-16 and July 21-22 at 7:30, July 17-18 at 8, and July 19 at 2 and 8. Through July 26.)

"DANCE OUT!"

In a new addition to the free-summer-dance calendar, the Joyce rotates three outdoor dance works through parks in all five boroughs, including Coney Island Beach, Pinocchio Park, in Staten Island, and Socrates Park, in Queens. In "Dans le Jardin," Michael Schumacher improvises with a live cellist. In "Contigo," João P. Pereira Dos Santos flips and twirls up and down a twenty-foot vertical pole. And in "Transports Exceptionnels" a dancer partners a five-ton excavator to the sounds of Maria Callas. (July 16-20. For a complete schedule, visit www.joyce.org.)

SUMMERDANZ FESTIVAL

July 16-17 at 7:30: As part of Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company's twenty-fifth-anniversary season, the New Jersey troupe shares the stage with the Norwegian singer, actress, and preservationist of Jewish culture Bente Kahan. Excerpts from the Dorfman repertory alternate with songs and monologues by Kahan, supported by a live klezmer band. The shared themes are connected at the end, with actual yarn, in an evocation of the Theresienstadt concentration camp. July 18-19 at 7:30: Nick Seligson-Ross and his ensemble Nicholas Andre Dance Theatre will perform two older quartets, "The Last Man" and "Etched," as well as a new piece set to the music of Arvo Pärt, suggestively named "Passio Nostri." (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA

The traditional flamenco company and its extraordinary star, Soledad Barrio, return to Theatre 80. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-352-3101. July 16-18 at 8, July 19 at 2 and 8, and July 20 at 2 and 5. Through Aug. 14.)

ROYAL BALLET OF FLANDERS / "IMPRESSING THE CZAR"

For its Lincoln Center Festival début, this ballet company from Antwerp brings a pivotal work of

postmodern dance theatre by the American-born, Germany-based choreographer William Forsythe. This is ballet in quotes, rife with dark humor and irony. The middle section, aptly titled "In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated," was made in 1987 for the Paris Ballet; it is an in-your-face paean to the sexiness and physical prowess of modern ballet dancers. The rest is pageantry and theatre, a self-conscious "deconstruction" of Western culture, from the Renaissance to contemporary television. (Rose Theatre, 60th St. at Broadway. 212-721-6500. July 17-18 at 8, July 19 at 2 and 8, and July 20 at 3.)

NELIDA TIRADO

A Bronx native seasoned in Spain, Tirado has matured into a world-class flamenco dancer, capable of summoning powerful forces. Her solo program at Joyce SoHo mixes traditionally structured compositions with a little contemporary experimentation and some video. She is joined by three local musicians, a singer from Seville, and El Keko, a guest dancer from Córdoba. (155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. July 17-20 at 8.)

360° DANCE COMPANY

The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's "Site-lines" series continues with this troupe of former Martha Graham dancers (Alessandra Prosperi, Erica Dankmeyer, and 360's artistic director, Martin Løfsnes) performing "Maktub," a new work

Rebwar Saeed; the other, "Japanese Garden," is self-explanatory. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Through Aug. 24.)

FIRE ISLAND DANCE FESTIVAL

Party, AIDS benefit, and dance extravaganza all rolled into one, this two-day outdoor festival offers an additional attraction: the stunning Great South Bay at sunset. The eleven companies include Atlanta Ballet, Ballet Hispánico, Rasta Thomas's Bad Boys of Dance, Lar Lubovitch, and Jennifer Muller. The master of ceremonies on Saturday is Whoopi Goldberg, followed by the comedian Caroline Rhea on Sunday. For a full schedule, visit www.draddance.org. (Fire Island Pines, N.Y. 212-840-0770. July 19 at 5 and 7 and July 20 at 5.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

(LE) POISSON ROUGE

This new club (see Night Life) is devoted to creatively presenting music of all kinds to a stylish young audience; Ronen Givony's genre-defying "Wordless Music" series, whose concert venues used to be sprinkled throughout the city, will take



The new club (Le) Poisson Rouge breathes fresh life into the former Village Gate space.

by the Atlanta Ballet choreographer Lauri Stallings, at South Street Seaport's Pier 17. (July 21-22 at noon and 1. Through July 30.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW

July 16-20: The main attraction this week is Ballet Boyz, the contemporary dance company formed by Michael Nunn and William Trevitt. At the Ted Shawn, a mixed cast of dancers presents Liv Lorent's swirling "Propellor," Russell Maliphant's push-and-pull trio "Broken Fall," and a new crowd-pleaser, a witty and competitive man-on-man tango for Trevitt and Nunn, "Yumba vs. Nonino," by Craig Revel Horwood, one of the judges on the BBC show "Strictly Come Dancing." ♦ July 17-20: The Doris Duke Theatre becomes an interactive playground, as the Italian theatre company Teatro di Piazza d'Occasione lays down a touch-sensitive floor that triggers projections of digital graphics and sounds. For one program, "Painted Garden," the imagery comes courtesy of the Kurdish painter

up residence here. July 16 at 7 and July 17 at 8: The Metropolis Ensemble, conducted by Andrew Cyr, offers the world première of "The Rite: Remixed," a three-composer arrangement of Stravinsky's Fauvist ballet that combines percussion, brass, and live electronics. ♦ July 22 at 7: The pianist Kathleen Supové joins another avant-garde magus, the renowned electronic composer Morton Subotnick, for a collaborative concert. (158 Bleecker St. 212-796-0741.)

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA

Things may be shaking up at City Opera and the Met, but this longtime freelance company, led by Vincent La Selva (a master of Italianate style), keeps to old traditions—including its policy of free summer performances. This year brings "La Traviata," gamely staged in Central Park's elegant, if dilapidated, Naumburg Band Shell. (Enter at 72nd St. July 16 at 7:30. For more information, call 212-245-8837.)

BARGEMUSIC

Steven Beck—the former Peter Serkin student, and continual new-music maven, who leads the barge's little stable of pianists—has the run of the place this week, offering the first half of what will be a complete survey of the Beethoven piano sonatas. The first concert features the Sonatas No. 1 in F Minor,

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No. 15 in D Major ("Pastorale"), and Nos. 27-28 in E Minor and A Major, respectively. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. July 16 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

INTERNATIONAL KEYBOARD INSTITUTE AND FESTIVAL

Jerome Rose's long-running summer celebration of the piano returns, with a lively mixture of master classes and concerts by pianists both well known and unfamiliar. An artist unquestionably worthy of one of the festival's "master series" concerts is Menahem Pressler, the pianist of the Beaux Arts Trio, which will retire in September; he is joined by another distinguished artist, the violinist Eugene Drucker, in a program that features sonatas for violin and piano by Mozart and Schubert (the "Duo" in A Major), as well as Schubert's Piano Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960. (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. July 16 at 8:30. 212-580-0210, ext. 4858. For full schedule, see www.wikif.org.)

OUT OF TOWN

TANGLEWOOD FESTIVAL

July 16 at 8: Three exceptional young artists play chamber music. The violinist Julia Fischer and the cellist Daniel Müller-Schott perform two classics of the duo repertory—the Handel-Halvorsen "Passacaglia" and Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello—before joining the pianist Jonathan Biss in Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio. ♦ July 17 at 8: The redoubtable Emerson String Quartet offers the complete quartets of Johannes Brahms. ♦ July 18 at 8:30: The Boston Symphony Orchestra's first concert of the week, led by Leonard Slatkin, features two substantial works: the Symphony No. 5 by John Harbison (with the mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey and the baritone Thomas Meghioranza) and Mahler's Symphony No. 1. ♦ July 19 at 8:30: Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (with Midori as the soloist) is the highlight of an exciting concert with the B.S.O. that also features performances of Vaughan Williams's "Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus,'" and Copland's Third Symphony, conducted by Slatkin. ♦ July 20 at 2:30: Shi-Yeon Sung makes her Tanglewood debut conducting the B.S.O. in music by Schumann (including the Piano Concerto, with Garrick Ohlsson) and Mendelssohn (the Symphony No. 4, "Italian"). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

TANGLEWOOD FESTIVAL: "ELLIOTT CARTER CENTENARY"

In a bold—but not surprising—move, Tanglewood devotes its entire Festival of Contemporary Music to the celebration of the great American composer's hundredth-birthday year, featuring the exceptionally talented fellows of the Tanglewood Music Center as well as several distinguished soloists. Here are some highlights: July 20 at 10 A.M.: The festivities begin with the renowned Carter advocate Oliver Knussen conducting his younger colleagues in such works as the "Asko Concerto," "Luimen," and the Double Concerto for Piano and Harpsichord (with Charles Rosen and Ursula Oppens). ♦ July 21 at 5: Rosen and Oppens take to the keyboard in Ozawa Hall to perform three solo pieces by Carter: the recent work "Matribute" as well as two classics, the Piano Sonata and "Night Fantasies." (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200. Through July 24. For complete schedule, see www.tanglewood.org.)

CARAMOOR FESTIVAL

July 17 at 7:30: The Daedalus Quartet, a fresh and vital young participant in what is a golden age of American string quartets, opens the week at Westchester's elegant festival by offering performances of quartets by Haydn (in D Major,

Op. 20, No. 4), Shostakovich (No. 3 in F Major), and Sibelius. ♦ July 18 at 8: For the sometime musicologist Will Crutchfield, Caramoor's decisive director of opera, authoritative texts are always favored; he conducts a performance of "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" that features not only such singers as the tenor Barry Banks and the baritone Daniel Mobbs but also a new edition—by the eminent Philip Gossett—that uses Rossini's lighter, original orchestration. ♦ July 19 at 8: The glamorous and gifted violinist Sarah Chang is the soloist in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, part of a concert by the Orchestra of St. Luke's that also features music by Mozart (the Overture to "The

Hierholzer, and the clarinetist Ethan Sloane offer a concert that features two grand works by Schubert (the Piano Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960, and "Shepherd on the Rock") along with a selection of lieder from Hugo Wolf's exquisite "Italian Songbook." ♦ July 20 at 4: The young and winning Pacifica Quartet performs string quartets by Mendelssohn, Prokofiev (No. 2, "On Kardinian Themes," a memoir of his relocation to the Caucasus during the Second World War), and Beethoven (in F Minor, "Seroso"). (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

Shakespeare is all the rage at Glimmerglass this summer, with four Bard-based works performed on a single set inspired by the playwright's own Globe Theatre. July 19 at 8 and July 22 at 2: Glimmerglass makes history by offering the first fully staged American performances of the young Richard Wagner's second opera, "Das Liebesverbot" ("The Ban on Love"), which relocates Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure" to Palermo; a comic opera in praise of free love, it spurns ponderous Germanic influences in favor of those of Auber and Bellini. Nicholas Muni's production sets the work in nineteenth-fifties Italy; Corrado Rovaris, the music director of the Opera Company of Philadelphia, conducts a cast that features Mark Schnaible, Claudia Waite, Richard Cox, and Holli Harrison. ♦ July 20 at 2: David Stern conducts a production of Handel's "Giulio Cesare" that features Laura Vlasak Nolen singing the "pants role" of the title, with Lyubov Petrova, another singer from the Metropolitan Opera roster, as Cleopatra. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

MARLBORO FESTIVAL

The festival and school founded by Rudolf Serkin remain a bastion of chamber music at its best, with some of the world's leading musicians (including the pianists Richard Goode and Mitsuko Uchida) and their phenomenally talented protégés offering the public the results of their demanding, in-depth rehearsals. Concert programs are listed a week in advance on the festival's Web site, www.marlbormusic.org. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. July 19 at 8:30 and July 20 at 2:30.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN

The Formosa Quartet and the pianist Pamela Mia Paul come to northern Connecticut's string-quartet shrine to offer a hefty program of music by Wolf (the "Italian Serenade"), Beethoven, (the Quartet in B-Flat Major, Op. 130), and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in A Major) along with a new work by Shih-Hui Chen. (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. July 20 at 3.)



Kehinde Wiley has a show at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

Magic Flute"), Mussorgsky, and Tchaikovsky (the clangorous tone poem "Francesca da Rimini"); Peter Oundjian conducts. ♦ July 20 at 4:30: All three quartets by Johannes Brahms, played in commanding style by the Emerson String Quartet. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252. For full schedule, see www.caramoor.org.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The summer outpost of the Yale School of Music offers concerts in its elegant and intimate wood-paneled Music Shed. July 18 at 8: A roster of Norfolk regulars—including the flutist Patti Monson and the pianist Claude Frank—join members of the fine Keller Quartet (an intriguing addition to the festival roster) in music by Debussy (the Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp), Duruflé, Ravel, and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in G Minor). ♦ July 19 at 8: The Keller, renowned for its advocacy of Kurtág, joins some colleagues to reach back to music by Webern and Tchaikovsky (the String Quartet No. 1 and "Souvenir de Florence," for string sextet). (Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS

This summer series' tranquil music chapel (with world-class acoustics) hosts a stream of vibrant performances each summer. July 19 at 6: The soprano Nancy Allen Lundy, the pianist Babette

MOVIES OPENING

BEFORE I FORGET

Jacques Nolot directed and stars in this drama, about an aging gay man who must cope with his loneliness. In French. Opening July 18. (IFC Center.)

THE DARK KNIGHT

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening July 18. (In wide release.)

THE DOORMAN

A mockumentary directed by Wayne Price, about the gatekeeper at a hot New York night club. Opening July 18. (Village East Cinema.)

LOU REED'S BERLIN

Julian Schnabel directed this documentary, about the musician's 2006 performance of his 1973 rock opera. Opening July 18. (Film Forum.)

NICHOLAS HAGGARD

MAD DETECTIVE

Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai directed this police drama, about a detective who can see people's inner demons. In Cantonese. Opening July 18. (IFC Center.)

MAMMA MIA!

A comic drama directed by Phyllida Lloyd, based on the play featuring ABBA's music, about a woman in search of her father. Starring Meryl Streep, Colin Firth, and Pierce Brosnan. Opening July 18. (In wide release.)

A MAN NAMED PEARL

A documentary by Scott Galloway and Brent Pierson, about Pearl Fryar, whose topiary garden in Bishopville, South Carolina, has attracted attention. Opening July 18. (Angelika Film Center.)

TAKE

Charles Oliver directed this thriller, about a mother (Minnie Driver) who is obsessed with the execution of the criminal (Jeremy Renner) who killed her son. Opening July 18. (Sunshine Cinema.)

TRANSIBERIAN

A thriller directed by Brad Anderson, about an American couple (Woody Harrelson and Emily Mortimer) who ride the train from Beijing to Moscow and fall into the hands of political operatives. Co-starring Ben Kingsley. Opening July 18. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

CLIMATES

The Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan daringly casts himself and his wife, Ebru Ceylan, in the lead roles of this poignant yet hard-edged modernist melodrama. During a beachside summer vacation, Isa, a struggling university lecturer, senses that his marriage to Bahar, a television art director, is falling apart, and, at his suggestion, they separate. He drifts through life in cosmopolitan, artistic Istanbul until he learns that Bahar has left town to work on a film in Turkey's rural, tradition-bound East and heads off to find her. Ceylan's long takes and brooding closeups capture the faces, gestures, and longings of Istanbul's aging bourgeois bohemians, as well as the moody nuances of actual and emotional weather—the ice storm brewing between Isa and Bahar at a balmy resort, the passionate heat of lovers during a blizzard. Shifting between his characters' outer and inner realities with a deft, novelistic omniscience, Ceylan nonetheless remains resolutely outside their motives in the film's most disturbing scene, a sexual conquest that appears to be rape. Paradoxically, the film's troubling ambiguities are among its virtues: under the guise of the universal theme of love and its mysteries, Ceylan offers a glimpse of harsh and unresolved local particulars. In Turkish.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA; July 16.)

CONFLAGRATION

A mournful Japanese masterpiece from 1958, based on Yukio Mishima's "Temple of the Golden Pavilion." The director, Kon Ichikawa, portrays the jagged mental topography of a stuttering student who sets fire to a Buddhist shrine. We see this pavilion as he does, an oasis of unsullied beauty, but we also see how burning it to save it from corruption would be an act of lunacy. The movie is a nightmare of wounded adolescence: the antihero has no bank of emotions to draw on when faced with the infidelity of his mother, the death of his beloved father, and the pettiness and venality that are rife even on temple grounds. Ichikawa splashes the sombre tale with knowing satire and erotic humor, especially by way of a hypocritical priest and a clubfooted, manipulative student, who are wonderfully played by Ganjiro Nakamura and Tatsuya Nakadai, respectively. But at the film's center is Raizô Ichikawa, who is heartbreaking as he goes from tabula rasa to wretched soul. In Japanese.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; July 16.)

THE EXILES

Kent Mackenzie's miraculous independent film, made between 1958 and 1961 with scrounged film, borrowed equipment, donated services, and free labor, has, scandalously, not been released

commercially until now. Mackenzie, while a U.S.C. film student, befriended Native Americans who had left their reservations and towns for Los Angeles, and he persuaded them to reenact scenes from their own lives for the camera. The resulting drama, a Pilgrim's Progress of three characters through a night of urban loneliness and dissipation, has an epic grandeur and a monumental intimacy that belies its mere seventy-two minutes. Yvonne, who is pregnant and dreams of a better life for her child, drains away the hours watching B-Westerns in an all-night grind house while her layabout boyfriend, Homer, goes out to drink and gamble. Tommy, a smooth operator, hangs out in bars and tries to pick up women but likens his life to "doing time on the outside." Mackenzie films the minutely incremental action (or, more often, inaction) in strikingly textured and composed images (the night photography alone would make the film immortal), balancing them with the characters' revealing, poignant voice-over monologues. Few directors in the history of cinema have so skillfully and deeply joined a sense of place with the subtle flux of inner life.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

GET SMART

This good-natured but bland reprise of the sixties TV classic offers a few laughs but little delight. As the bumbling top-secret Agent 86, Steve Carell delivers his droll dialogue with style, but he's no physical comedian; Anne Hathaway, a radiant romantic actress pressed into duty as his ultra-competent partner, Agent 99, is no comedian at all, though she brings the brief moments of manufactured pathos fully to life. There are some well-conceived gags and, as in the series, lots of funny gadgets, but the plot has been ramped up into a noisy and pointless action spectacle, full of generic C.G.I. The best scene is a high-stakes dance-off that is, alas, edited to death, leaving the impression that few of the actors know how to dance. A climactic wink at Hitchcock's "The Man Who Knew Too Much" does this time-filler no favors.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

HANCOCK

Will Smith's lonely, alcoholic superhero—a nihilist slob who can't fly anywhere in Los Angeles without making a mess—is hated by everybody. The public curses him, and even the Dickensian TV lawyer Nancy Grace—of the curling lip and ferocious eye—gets on his case. A good-hearted P.R. man, Ray (Jason Bateman), tries to do something for Hancock's image. But then Ray introduces Hancock to his wife, Mary (Charlize Theron), and this inventive summer spectacle adds sexual tension and emotional power to its visual gags. For the first time in his life, Will Smith doesn't smile and tease and drawl; he stays in character as a self-hating lonely guy, and Theron, no longer covering her beauty, looks at him with an uncanny mixture of attraction and alarm. The movie takes surprising turns and is unexpectedly affecting. Written by Vy Vincent Ngo and Vince Gilligan and directed by Peter Berg.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/7 & 14/08.) (In wide release.)

THE HAPPENING

An invertebrate exercise in fear from M. Night Shyamalan, who seems to have mislaid the disciplined dread that he could summon in the days of "The Sixth Sense." Mark Wahlberg plays a math teacher who, in the company of his wife (Zooey Deschanel) and a few stragglers, flees the nameless, invisible toxic wave that is being swept along the Eastern Seaboard by trees, grass, and all things green. The urgent topicality of this threat is outdone only by its dramatic vagueness; when it finally and limply subsides, it does so without explanation. "The Birds," you could argue, had just such a quiet climax, plus a hint of some mysterious link between the forces of nature and private human dismay, but Hitchcock sustained his ominous mood, whereas Shyamalan—after the tautness of the first twenty minutes, which he handles with aplomb—swiftly loses his grip. Both the script and the performances tip toward the risible: a pity, because through the cracks in the nonsense one can still glimpse the director's abiding (and unmodish) fixation on all

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK PANHANDLERS

When "The Last Picture Show" came out, in 1971, it was acclaimed not only as the breakout hit of a young gun (the director, Peter Bogdanovich, was still in his early thirties) but also as a dusty remembrance of things past. The movie was set twenty years before, in a



small Texas town, where even the young folk—played to perfection by Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, Timothy Bottoms, and others—bore the look of natural-born elegists, and where the quest for sexual services (led by Cloris Leachman, as the wife of a sports coach) seemed less a matter of lust, let alone joy, than a desperate bid to delay the dying falls of love. Nowadays, we are the nostalgists, and it is Bogdanovich's film (which the director David Gordon Green selected for a July 20 screening at BAM) that asks to be treasured as the product—indeed, the standard-bearer—of a faded age. There was a time when movies themselves felt like small towns: rooted fast in their environments, and alive to the wistful chatter of minor characters as they crossed paths and then went on their way.

—*Anthony Lane*

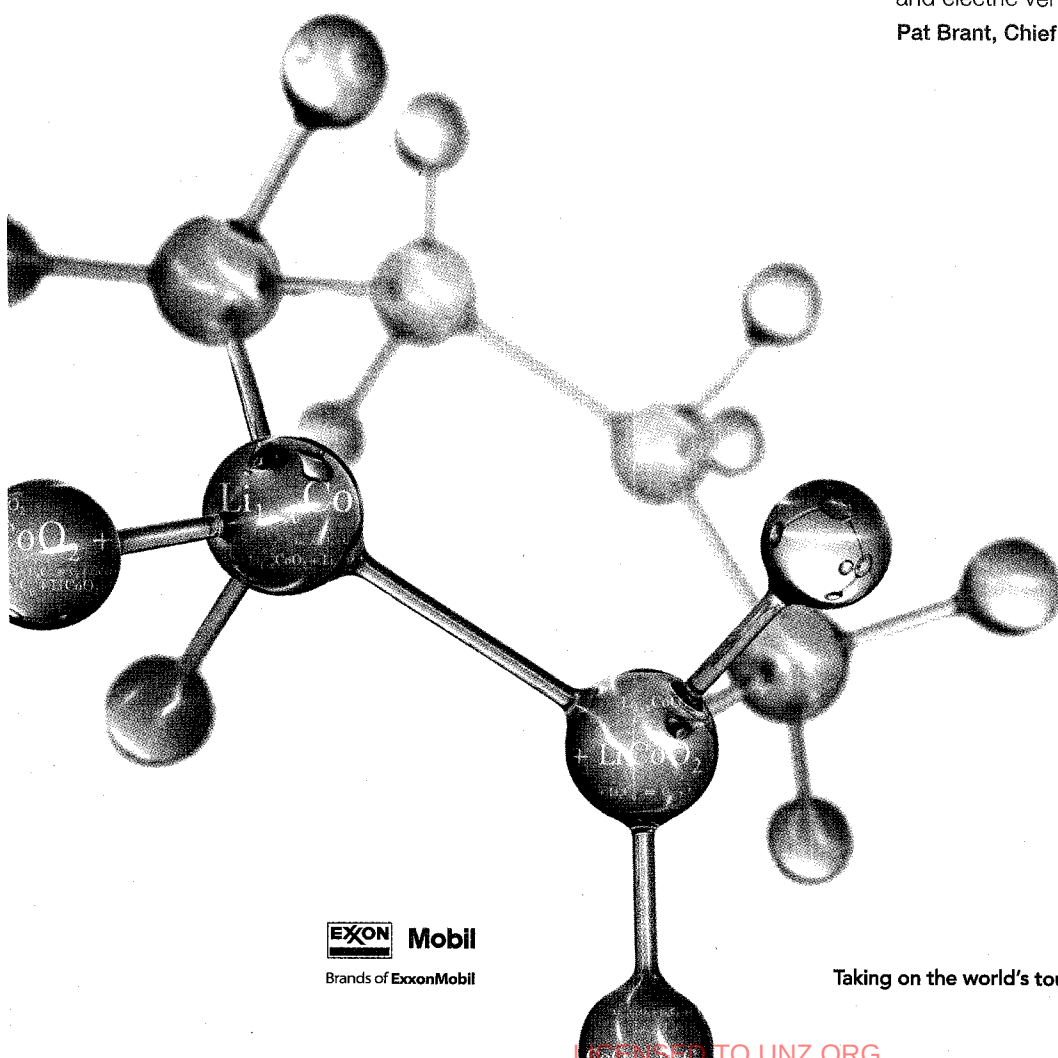
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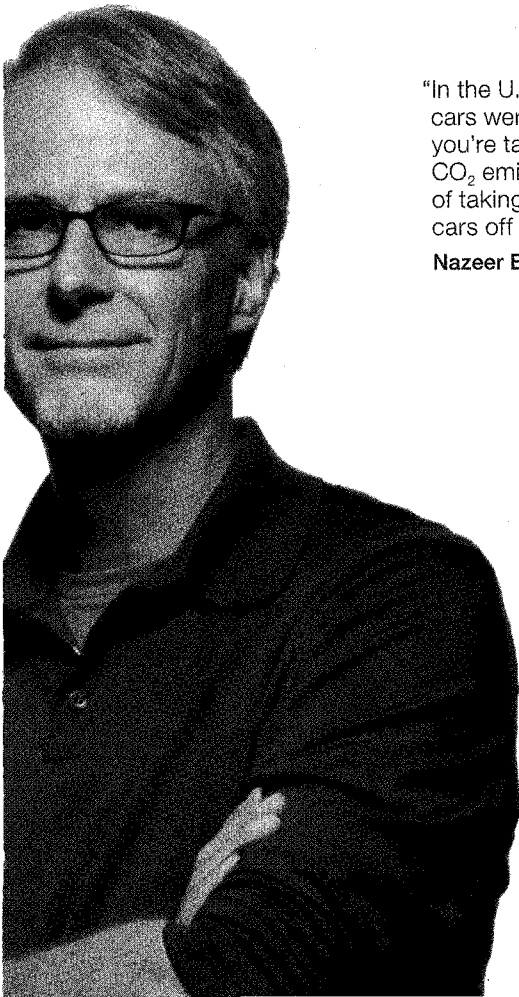
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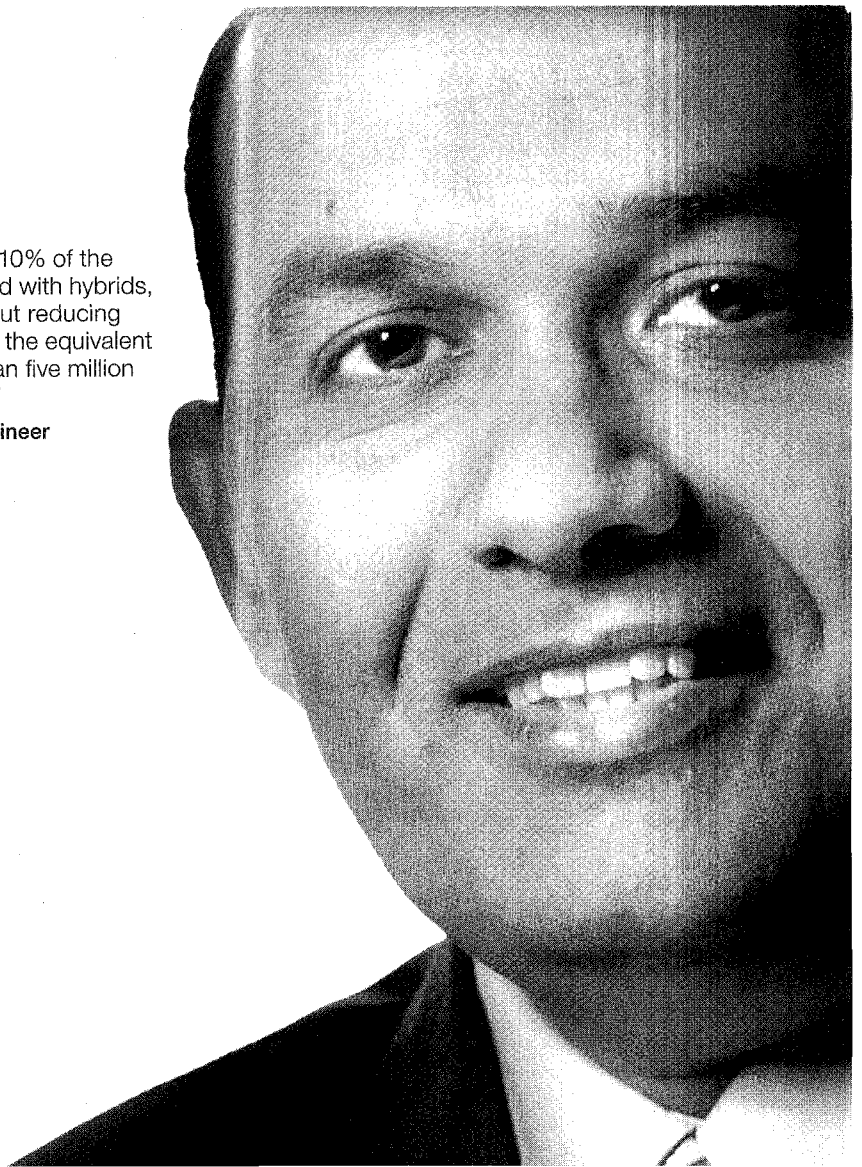
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things drear and deathly. He could spook us yet.—*Anthony Lane* (6/30/08) (In wide release.)

HELLBOY II: THE GOLDEN ARMY

The fabulist director Guillermo del Toro gets a hefty budget to continue his comic-book franchise with this action-packed fantasy about a heroic demon (Ron Perlman) and his fellow beasties (Selma Blair, Doug Jones). This time, his team is joined by an ectoplasmic force (voiced by Seth MacFarlane with a Colonel Klink-like accent) that can animate inanimate objects. It's that kind of movie. The plot is thin, involving some hokey about the denizens of a hidden underground world who are out to destroy humanity. And, while Hellboy and his friends set out to save the day, intriguing story lines are brought up and then dropped (in all likelihood they will be picked up in a third installment). This film is happy to coast on its good humor and brilliant action pieces. Fair enough, since del Toro has taken the poetry of some of his best work and butchered it up, creating some of the most amazing-looking creatures and battles of his career. It's eye candy for the "Creature Features" set.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

The director, Louis Leterrier, doesn't try for poetry the way Ang Lee, the director of "Hulk," did in 2003, but Leterrier is marginally better than Lee at the summer-action-spectacle side of the Hulk story. Edward Norton, replacing Eric Bana, is Bruce Banner, a man who, when provoked, grows into fifteen feet or so of lime-green power with the temperament of a nasty five-year-old boy—he likes to throw things. But the truth is that, in any version, the Hulk is a dull beast. He's just a big angry guy; he has no soul, no oddities, no vulnerable or tender spots. If Bruce, in his normal state, were ambivalent about the powers that lie within him—drawn to the excitement of enormous strength but also repelled by it—the tension for the audience might be overwhelming, because this would speak to the way that we, too, are both tempted and repelled by anger. But the movie presents Bruce conventionally, as a man who has a strange, hateful disease that he can't get rid of, and the digital destruction derby that follows Bruce's enlargement is large-scale but familiar. It's a tired movie for a jaded audience.—*D.D.* (6/23/08) (In wide release.)

ROMAN POLANSKI: WANTED AND DESIRED

Many of the facts are familiar: Roman Polanski was arrested in 1977 for having sex with a thirteen-year-old girl. He pled guilty to a criminal offense, and, the next year, while awaiting sentencing, he fled to France, where he remains to this day. Marina Zenovich's documentary, bland as cinema but satisfying as journalism, goes behind the scenes of the case to reveal the legal maneuvering that went into it. Through in-depth interviews with most of the protagonists, notably the victim, the lead prosecutor, and Polanski's defense attorney—though not with Polanski or Judge Laurence J. Rittenband, who is deceased—Zenovich explains why Polanski fled, and why it was reasonable for him to do so: because, despite having negotiated a plea and having been recommended for probation, he was subject to the whims of a highly media-sensitive (and unscrupulous) judge who feared being made to look bad. Zenovich is particularly good at showing the personalities and the media politics that drive the legal system, but she does Polanski no favors by dwelling on his difficult past (as if asking for mercy from the viewer) and yet selecting archival clips in which he comes off as almost solipsistically remorseless.—*R.B.* (Quad Cinema.)

TELL NO ONE

The young director and actor Guillaume Canet, working with the screenwriter Philippe Lefebvre, has taken Harlan Coben's American mystery novel from 2001 and set it in the realistic social and working world of Paris and its environs, where good-looking, intelligent, and articulate people find one another interesting. François Cluzet dominates the movie as a pediatrician whose wife was murdered eight years previously. When messages show up on his computer suggesting that she may still be alive, he's amazed, and tries to reach her,

only to run into the police and half the criminal underworld of Paris. Bounced back and forth among murderers and psychopaths, he has some remarkable adventures and learns about the past in tiny increments. We're meant to be a little lost, too—tantalized by hints and echoes. Underneath all the mysteries, however, there are some powerful forces at work, including the love of parents for children (one of whom is played by Canet himself). With Kristin Scott Thomas, André Dussollier, and Jean Rochefort. In French.—*D.D.* (7/7 & 14/08) (In wide release.)

THE WACKNESS

Ben Kingsley strains for his Alan Arkin moment in this pseudo-edgy, Manhattan-centric comic drama in the vein of "Little Miss Sunshine," set in 1994 in the age of Giuliani (whose name crops up repeatedly as a symbol of all the repressed grunginess of yore). The young director Jonathan Levine draws on the romantic frustrations of his own high-school years to tell the sincere and mawkish yet loopy story of Luke Shapiro (Josh Peck), who graduates from a private school on the Upper East Side with low grades and a high-profit job as a marijuana dealer, peddling his wares from a pushcart labelled "Ices." When Luke is down in the dumps he sees a psychiatrist, Dr. Jeffrey Squires (Kingsley), whom he pays in dime or quarter bags—and who is the stepfather of Luke's object of affection, Stephanie (Olivia Thirlby). The burgeoning romance is sweet and plausible, if utterly conventional, but Kingsley's weird-old-man routine, played out in the shrink's growing bond with the smart yet naive young slacker, is fake and vain, a shameless play for an Oscar nod. This Sundance prize-winner, made on the cheap, is as formulaic and calculated as the most banal big-studio productions. With Famke Janssen, Method Man, and, for no reason at all, Mary-Kate Olsen.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

WANTED

After "Night Watch" and "Day Watch," two of the most successful—and certainly the loudest—Russian films ever made, the director Timur Bekmambetov has turned his hungry eyes on the United States. The result is this furious and fantastical piece of junk, which, though nominally set in some town called "Chicago," could take place almost anywhere with roads. The plot entails yet another revenge of the nerd: an accountant (James McAvoy) who follows in the footsteps of his father and becomes a dextrous assassin. He is trained in this delicate art by Sloan (Morgan Freeman), Fox (Angelina Jolie), and a bunch of other killers who have the best interests of the world at heart and, one hopes, their tongues firmly stapled to their cheeks. The outcome should be playful and zippy, and some of the chase sequences, to be fair, are enjoyably shameless in their rush to excess; but the film as a whole feels much nastier than it needs to be, abounding in details of damaged flesh, and it leaves a sour taste.—*A.L.* (6/30/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

GONZO: THE LIFE AND WORK OF DR. HUNTER S. THOMPSON: Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. **MEET DAVE:** In wide release. **TRUMBO:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. July 18 at 7 and 9; July 19-20 at 5, 7, and 9; and July 21-24 at 7 and 9: "Wonderful Town" (2007, Aditya Assarat; in Thai). ♦ "Louise Bourgeois on Film." All films are in French. July 16-17 at 7, July 18 at 7 and 9:30, and July 19-20 at 3: "La Rivière Gentille" (2007, Brigitte Cornand). ♦ July 16 at 9:15: "Chère Louise: A Portrait of Bourgeois" (1995, Cornand). ♦ July 17 at 9:15: "The Whisper of the Whistling Water" (2004, Cornand).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Special screenings. July 16 at 7:30: "Sunrise" (1927, F. W. Murnau; silent, with live accompanying music from the band Sepkano). ♦ "The World of David Gordon Green." July 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Snow Angels" (2007, Green). ♦ July 18 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "All the Real Girls" (2003, Green). ♦ July 19 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Picnic at Hanging Rock" (1975, Peter Weir). ♦ July 20 at 3, 6, and 9: "The Last Picture Show" (1971, Peter Bogdanovich). ♦ July 21 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Bless the Beasts and Children" (1971, Stanley Kramer). ♦ July 21 at 6:50: "George Washington" (2000, Green). ♦ July 22 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Night of the Hunter" (1955, Charles Laughton). ♦ July 22 at 6:50: "Undertow" (2004, Green), introduced by the director.

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—The films of Tatsuya Nakadai. All films are in Japanese. July 15 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10 and July 16 at 1, 3:15, and 5:30: "Kill!" (1968, Kihachi Okamoto). ♦ July 16 at 7:45 and 9:45: "Conflagration" (†). ♦ July 17 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Sanjuro" (1962, Akira Kurosawa). ♦ Through Aug. 7: "The Human Condition" (1959-1961, Masaki Kobayashi), in three parts. July 18-20 at 12, 4, and 8:10 and July 21-22 at 2 and 7:30: Part One, "No Greater Love."

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Special screening. July 17 at 7: "In Praise of Love" (2001, Jean-Luc Godard; in French), introduced by the *New Yorker* writer Richard Brody. ♦ "Homage to Yves Montand" July 22 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Z" (1969, Costa-Gavras; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. July 18-20 at 11 A.M.: "Port of Call" (1948, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." July 18-19: "Xanadu" (1980, Robert Greenwald), featuring a sing-along.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Zeitgeist: The Films of Our Time." July 16 at 5:30: "Climates" (†). ♦ July 16 at 8 and July 19 at 5:30: "Lumumba" (2001, Raoul Peck; in French and Lingala). ♦ July 17 at 5:30 and July 19 at 3:30: "Ballets Russes" (2005, Dan Geller and Dayna Goldfine). The July 19 screening will be introduced by the directors and the dancer Freddie Franklin. ♦ July 17-18 at 8: "Nowhere in Africa" (2002, Caroline Link; in German and Swahili). ♦ July 19 at 6 and July 21 at 5:30: "The Gleaners and I" (2001, Agnès Varda; in French). ♦ July 19 at 8:30 and July 23 at 5:30: "See the Sea" (1997, François Ozon; in French) and "A Summer Dress" (1996, Ozon; in French). ♦ July 20 at 4 and July 21 at 8: "Blue" (1993, Derek Jarman). ♦ July 20 at 6 and July 23 at 8: "Into Great Silence" (2006, Philip Gröning; in French). ♦ "Premiere Brazil." All films are in Portuguese. July 17 at 6 and July 21 at 6:30: "Estômago: A Gastronomic Story" (2007, Marcos Jorge). ♦ July 19 at 4: "Drifter" (2007, Cao Guimarães). ♦ July 19 at 6: "The Mystery of Samba" (2008, Carolina Jabor). ♦ July 20 at 6: "My Name Ain't Johnny" (2007, Mauro Lima).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." July 18 at 9:30: "The Purple Rose of Cairo" (1985, Woody Allen).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine @Midnight." July 18-19: "The Tenant" (1978, Roman Polanski).

WALTER RADE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Special screenings. July 17 at 6:30: "American Teen" (2008, Nanette Burstein), introduced by the director. ♦ July 22 at 7:45 and 9:30: "4 Hands: Cecil Taylor and Yosuke Yamashita in Concert" (2007, Yasuhiko Shirai). ♦ Films from Slovenia. All films are in Slovenian unless noted otherwise. July 16 at 2 and July 20 at 4:45: "Vesna" (1953, Fran-



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tisek Cap). ♦ July 16 at 6:15 and July 19 at 5: "Rooster's Breakfast" (2007, Marko Nabersnik). ♦ July 17 at 2:30 and July 20 at 3: "Valley of Peace" (1956, France Stiglic). ♦ July 17 at 9 and July 19 at 3: "Raft of the Medusa" (1980, Karpo Godina; in Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian). ♦ July 19 at 1 and July 22 at 5:15: "Dance in the Rain" (1961, Bostjan Hladnik).

READINGS AND TALKS

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

From the fifties until his death, in 1966, Frank O'Hara worked at the Museum of Modern Art and wrote poetry during his lunch break. On July 16 at noon, the poets Lee Ann Brown, Dan Chiasson, Hettie Jones, Vincent Katz, and Philip Schultz visit the museum at a historically appropriate hour for a reading from O'Hara's newly published "Selected Poems." (Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9781.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE

Junot Díaz, the winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction for his debut novel, "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," and the novelist Aleksandar Hemon read from their work. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 212-360-2777. July 17 at 7.)

ITALIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE

The institute, in conjunction with the Centro Primo Levi, presents a two-day program examining the connection between the novelists Italo Svevo and James Joyce, who first met in Trieste more than a hundred years ago. On July 21 at 6, the Joyce scholar Jesse Meyers discusses the

Adriatic port town, which is where Joyce began writing "Ulysses," and its role in the creation of the modern novel. A documentary about the city will also be screened. The following night, at 6, the 2001 Italian film "Le Parole di Mio Padre," which is based on Svevo's novel "La Coscienza di Zeno," will be shown. (686 Park Ave., between 68th and 69th Sts. 212-879-4242.)

BOOK CULTURE

The independent Upper West Side bookstore hosts a discussion celebrating the launch of the summer issue of *Dissent* magazine. The writers Joshua Freeman, David Greenberg, and Suzanne Nossel will ponder the past four decades of American politics as they address the question "Is the Conservative Era Over?" Michael Walzer, a co-editor of the magazine, is the moderator. (536 W. 112th St. No tickets necessary. July 22 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BARD ON THE RUN

More than twenty years ago, Jess Winfield, an actor, writer, and producer from Los Angeles, helped create the Reduced Shakespeare Company, a guerrilla-theatre troupe that, early in its history, condensed all of Shakespeare's plays into a single piece, and has since boiled down the Bible and the history of America in similar fashion. Winfield left the company in 1992 to become a producer at Disney, but he didn't abandon the Bard. In 2000, he wrote an advice book, "What Would Shakespeare Do?," and he recently departed Disney to work on his fiction: "My Name Is Will: A Novel of Sex, Drugs, and Shakespeare"

came out earlier this month. On July 19, he attempts to set the world record for Most Shakespeare Plays Performed Solo in Brooklyn in a Single Day. His historic venture commences at 2 P.M. on Manhattan's Pier 11 for a warmup aboard the free Ikea ferry to Red Hook and continues in earnest in bars, parks, and bookstores in the Brooklyn neighborhood. (For more information, call 718-643-8484.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

James Brown's thrilling precision, percussive singing, fluid dance moves, and amazing stage presence were all part of the mystique of the man who came to be known as the Godfather of Soul. So did his crazy sense of style, which included loads of white, gold, and red jumpsuits (some decorated with lamé, others featuring ruffled bell-bottoms, puffy sleeves, and the word "sex" emblazoned across the belly), capes, furs, and sunglasses. Many of these highly individual outfits—including the denim jumpsuit he wore for the concert preceding Muhammad Ali's "Rumble in the Jungle" match against George Foreman, in Kinshasa—as well as furniture, assorted awards, musical instruments, and photographs, go up for sale at a special auction at Christie's devoted to the R. & B. musician revered by cool cats, hip-hoppers, and classical musicians alike (July 17). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

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ON THE HORIZON

ABOVE AND BEYOND PUSHING BUTTONS

July 25-27

William Schimmel, who has played the accordion with major orchestras, jazz bands, and pop stars, directs and moderates the annual American Accordionists' Association Master Class & Concert series. (www.ameraccord.com.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC WOLFGANG WHO?

July 29-30

Mozart will be a potent but partial presence at the opening performances of

the Mostly Mozart Festival. In two concerts conducted by Louis Langrée, the great Symphony No. 40 in G Minor will serve as a prelude to Schoenberg's chamber version of Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde." (212-721-6500.)

MOVIES GOOD AS GOULD

Aug. 1-21

Sardonic, spontaneous, and sentimental, the actor Elliott Gould, who became a big movie star in the late sixties and remained one through the seventies, was an emblem of an age of paradox. BAM offers three weeks of his best work,

including the famous (Robert Altman's "M*A*S*H") and the obscure (Ingmar Bergman's "The Touch"). (718-636-4100.)

ART MASTER PLAN

Aug. 12-28

While the Frick Collection spruces up its Living Hall, six paintings that have rarely left their wood-paneled quarters since 1915—masterworks by Bellini, Titian, Holbein, and El Greco—will be temporarily relocated to the museum's Oval Room. (212-288-0700.)

THE THEATRE SOUL SISTER

Aug. 19

The American soul singer India.Arie, who is due to release her fourth solo album later this year, makes her Broadway debut in an updated version of Ntozake Shange's 1976 poetry play, "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf." Hinton Battle choreographs the show at Circle in the Square; Shirley Jo Finney directs. (212-239-6200.)

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT FLIP-FLOP FLAP



One of the World Wide Web's most distinguished organs of fake news, the Borowitz Report, leads its current issue with this flash:

The liberal blogosphere was aflame today with new accusations that Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill) is trying to win the 2008 presidential election.

Except that sometimes it's hard to tell fake from real. These sentiments, for example, are from actual blogs:

If Obama believes the BS he said about the FISA Capitulation bill, then he is not fit to be President.

He is turning on every major issue and I am not going to vote for him.

From here on out, the netroots should refuse to donate to any Democratic nominee, including Barack Obama.

Obama, it turns out, is a politician. In this respect, he resembles the forty-three Presidents he hopes to succeed, from the Father of His Country to the wayward son, Alpha George to Omega George. Winning a Presidential election doesn't require being all things to all of the people all of the time, but it does require being some things to most of the people some of the time. It doesn't require saying one thing and also saying its opposite, but it does require saying more or less the same thing in ways that are understood in different ways. They're all politicians, yes—very much including Obama, as Ryan Lizza shows else-

where in this issue. But that doesn't mean they're all the same.

It was inevitable that the boggier reaches of the blogosphere would eventually smell betrayal. In contrast, what bloggers call the MSM—the mainstream media—seldom trades in the currency of moral indignation. Although the better newspapers have regular features devoted to evaluating the candidates' proposals for workability, the MSM generally eschews value judgments about the merits. The MSM—especially the cable-news intravenous drip—prefers flip-flops.

Obama has been providing plenty of plastic for the flip-flop factories with the adjustments he's been making as he retools his campaign for the general election. Under headlines like "IN CAMPAIGN, ONE MAN'S PRAGMATISM IS ANOTHER'S FLIP-FLOPPING," the big papers have been assembling quite a list of

matters on which the candidate has "changed his position," including Iraq, abortion rights, federal aid to faith-based social services, capital punishment, gun control, public financing of campaigns, and wiretapping. Most of them are mere shifts of emphasis, some are marginal tweaks, and a few are either substantive or nonexistent. Let's do a quick *tour d'horizon*.

On July 3rd, Obama remarked to reporters, vis-à-vis his projected visit to Iraq, that he will "continue to refine" his policies in light of what he learns there. The flip-flop frenzy exploded so quickly that Obama called a second press conference that same day in an effort to tamp it down, saying that while he "would be a poor commander-in-chief" if he "didn't take facts on the ground into account," his intention to withdraw American combat troops from Iraq within sixteen months of his Inauguration—which is to say less than two years from now—remains unchanged. Flip-flop category: marginal tweak.

The same week, Obama said he didn't think that "mental distress" alone was sufficient justification for a late-term abortion, prompting the president of the National Organization for Women to rebuke him for feeding the perception that women seek abortions because they're "having a bad-hair day." In "The Audacity of Hope," Obama had written that

the willingness of even the most ardent prochoice advocates to accept some restrictions on late-term abortion marks a recognition that a fetus is more than a body part and that society has some interest in its development.

The leading reproductive-rights group, NARAL Pro-Choice America, defended



him, pointing out that his views are fully consistent with *Roe v. Wade*. Flip-flop category: nonexistent.

Obama also wrote that "certain faith-based programs" could offer "a uniquely powerful way of solving problems and hence merit carefully tailored support." Yet his recent call for an expansion of President Bush's program came as a shock to some, including the *Times*, which called the program a violation of the separation of church and state. If it is, it's a minor one, like grants to religiously affiliated colleges; in any event, this isn't a new position for Obama. Flip-flop category: shift of emphasis.

For twenty years, nominal support for the death penalty and its partner in crime, "gun rights," has apparently been mandatory for any Democrat wishing to have a serious chance to be elected President. Without enthusiasm, Obama has endorsed capital punishment throughout his political career. In his book, he wrote that "the rape and murder of a child" is "so heinous, so beyond the pale, that the community is justified in expressing the full measure of its outrage by meting out the ultimate punishment." But in demurring from last month's Supreme Court decision banning executions for child rape alone, he went further: "and" is not "or." As for the Court's radical decision conferring upon an individual the right to possess guns separate from service in a "well regulated militia," he did not, as reported, "embrace" it. But he did commend it for providing "much-needed guidance to local jurisdictions"—a distinctly Panglossian spin. Still, if Obama becomes President the practical effect of these panders will be minimal. It's hard to imagine an Obama appointee to the Supreme Court voting with Justices Scalia and Thomas on issues like

these. Flip-flop category: substantive tweak.

As for the last two items on the flip-flop list—well, it's a fair cop, as the Brits say. Obama's decision to refuse public funds for the general-election campaign was political hardball, a spikes-high slide at third base. He still favors public financing in principle, and he says he'll work to modernize it in practice. In a sense, his utterly unexpected success in raising tens of millions from small, no-strings contributors has created a kind of unofficial public-finance system. But that success is a one-off, and the big contributors are still contributing big, with all that entails. He didn't change his "position," but he did break a promise.

Obama's U-turn on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act last week was not so trivial. He had promised to filibuster it if it retained the provision immunizing telecom companies from lawsuits arising from the companies' compliance with Administration requests—orders, really—to cooperate in patently illegal activity. The bill did retain that provision, and Obama voted not only for the bill but against the filibuster. Opinion is divided on the seriousness of the bill's threat to civil liberties. In the *Times* last week, the Open Society Institute's Morton H. Halperin, whose devotion to civil liberties is rivalled only by his knowledge of national-security matters, called the bill "our best chance to protect both our national security and our civil liberties." Other civil libertarians see it as the death knell for the Fourth Amendment. But there can be little doubt that Obama's vote—which could not have affected the outcome—was influenced by worry about being branded as soft on terrorism. Unlike FISA, the Iraq war can't be repealed.

But perhaps Obama will now take a more compassionate view of Hillary Clinton's vote to authorize it.

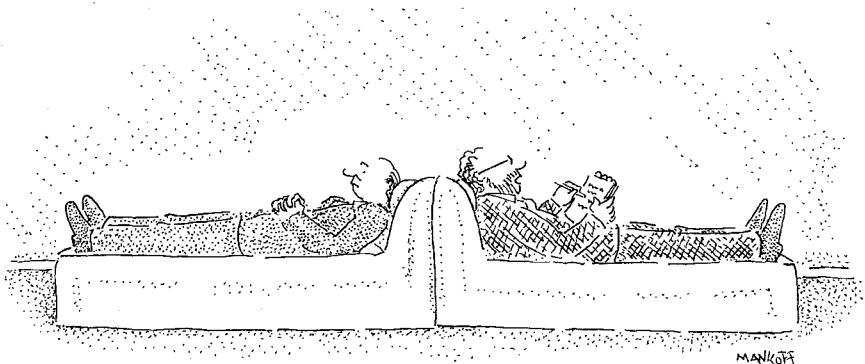
Meanwhile, McCain has been busily reversing his views in highly consequential ways. He opposed the Bush tax cuts because they favored the rich; now he supports their eternal extension. He was against offshore oil drilling as not being worth the environmental damage it brings; now he's for it, and damn the costs. He was against torture, period; now he's against it unless the C.I.A. does it. He keeps flipping to the wrong flops. But he and Obama can both take comfort in what they're avoiding. If they were clinging to every past position, the flip-flop police would be busting them for stubbornness and rigidity in the face of changing circumstances. Bush all over again! Flip-flops are preferable to cement shoes, especially in summertime.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE H-BLOO ON A-ROD



Shortly before his regular teatime, one day last week, the Yale literature professor Harold Bloom found an occasion to consider the plight of his beloved Yankees, as they approached the All Star break in third place, and of their star third baseman, Alex Rodriguez. "The poor fellow, you know he's a great player, but he's never been a particularly sympathetic human being," Bloom said. "And he certainly looks rather awful at the moment." Bloom was hard at work on his next book—"I am literally sitting here brooding on Kafka and the Kabbalah"—and had therefore been avoiding the "popular press," as he called it, but the latest rumors involving A-Rod had not escaped him. "My son the other day said to me that you could not pick up either of the tabloids without finding something about the supposed relationship to the famous Madonna." There were at least a couple of nice coincidences in this: Madonna may be the world's most famous adherent of Kabbalah (or "that ghastly sort of adulterated popular Kabbalah," as Bloom put it), and, according



"Look, you're not the only one with problems."

to that day's *Post*, Rodriguez had recently decamped to the Four Seasons, where he was seen sipping tea, more like a scholar of Jewish mysticism than like a slugger.

To recap: Rodriguez's wife, Cynthia, filed for divorce last Monday, citing emotional abandonment, extramarital affairs, and "other marital misconduct" on her husband's part, after it was



A-Rod and Madonna

reported that the three-time M.V.P. had been spotted visiting the Central Park West apartment of the seven-time Grammy-winning pop singer. ("She's my fucking soul mate, dude," A-Rod was reported to have told a friend in February, referring to Madonna, who is seventeen years his senior.) The Rodriguezes are an East Side family, and Cynthia, according to her lawyer, is "a Greek Orthodox lady." She flew to Paris as the scandal broke, and spent some time in the company of Lenny Kravitz, a reputed old Madonna flame, who has, like a born-again virgin, sworn off premarital sex, while Guy Ritchie, Madonna's husband, bravely outfitted his son Rocco in a Yankees T-shirt before facing the paparazzi. No less a moral authority than John Rocker, the former pitcher and Mets' nemesis ("Imagine having to take the 7 train to the ballpark, looking like you're riding through Beirut next to some kid with purple hair, next to some queer with AIDS," he once told *Sports Illustrated*), stepped forward as a character witness for A-Rod. "He has no STDs," Rocker said. "No illegitimate kids. No multiple wives." Professor Bloom picked a bad week to skip the tabs.

Rodriguez, though a frequent media attraction, has always been something of a cipher—seemingly the neediest of

superstars and also the most emotionally remote, capable of confessing to seeing a therapist one day, like a jock king's version of Tony Soprano, and appearing shirtless in Central Park the next. For the amateur psychologists among us, the fallout in the papers has been useful in providing glimpses of the inner A-Rod. "He had a sweet tooth," a former Ms. Bikini Universe told the *News*. "He would come over and eat all of my candy." They met when he saw her sturdy arms and asked, "Where do you work out?"

Cynthia Rodriguez happens to have a master's in psychology, and, according to Cindy Adams, in the *Post*, "She'll be there for him the day he cracks up because she knows it's going to be—the words used are—'an ugly thing.'"

"These are all very talented people—especially Lenny Kravitz," Rabbi Allan Nadler, the director of the Jewish Studies Program at Drew University, said last week. "But what a field of academia I'm in!" He explained that he'd been exchanging e-mails with a colleague in Jerusalem about possible textual antecedents—say, in the Zohar or the Sefer Yetzirah—for soul-mate poaching, and they had been unable to come up with any. "One of the dominant features of Kabbalah was teaching self-denial and asceticism," he said. Nadler is an outspoken critic of the Kabbalah Centre, in Los Angeles, where Madonna, Britney Spears, and Demi Moore, among others, have supposedly found inspiration. "It teaches self-fulfillment to the point of becoming God," he said. "So these are gods-in-training." Not that he thought a more authentic dedication to Lurianic Kabbalah could help a millionaire ballplayer. "The true Kabbalists, they fasted, and I think baseball players need their carbs," he said, and added that Rodriguez's bronzed complexion seemed incompatible with intense Aramaic study. "If you're a Kabbalist, you really have no time for the sun."

Bloom recommended reading "Kabbalah and Eros," by Moshe Idel, for a deeper understanding of the spiritual background to this latest saga. (From the introduction: "It appears that the relationship between the genders is much more flexible than commonly assumed, allowing for types of reciprocity that still await detailed investigation.") But on

strictly baseball terms he was confident enough to diagnose a problem. "The great Alex Rodriguez, the famous A-Rod, is not a clutch performer," he said. "He compiles these enormous statistics, but every time I make the mistake of looking at a game he comes up with two out and men on second and third, and does nothing."

—Ben McGrath

INK ISN'T IT ROMANTIC?



The plot of "The Romantics," a new novel by Galt Niederhoffer, unfolds during the weekend wedding of Lila Hayes, a blond, beautiful, witty, and wealthy Yale graduate, and her former classmate Tom McDevon, a handsome, charming, social-climbing cipher. The book's heroine—the clever, ill-at-ease, Brooklyn-dwelling Laura Rosen—was Lila's college roommate and is now her maid of honor; Laura dated Tom first, and, unbeknownst to the gilded WASPy bride, has for years sustained an intimacy with the groom-to-be. In the book's first chapter, Laura arrives at the nuptial site (an island off the coast of Maine) burdened by an unflattering pewter-colored gown and a heart filled with loathing for her best friend. Inevitably, romantic chaos ensues.

A party to celebrate the book's publication was held the other day at the home of Niederhoffer's friend Kathryn Tucker, a blond, beautiful, witty, and wealthy movie producer, who hosted guests on the roof of her Chelsea town house. The dress code was "slutty bridesmaid or slurring groomsman," but Tucker had ignored her own injunction, and was dressed in a flattering strapless dress the color of sea foam and red patent-leather Louboutin pumps with four-inch heels. "Look at me—it's conservative, conservative, conservative, and then the red pumps," Tucker said, as she elegantly navigated the treacherous decking underfoot, wineglass in hand.

Tucker has never been a bridesmaid, she said, "but I hope to be one day. It

seems the better role." She is separated from her husband, John Sloss, a sales agent for independent films. "The institution of marriage is a curious thing," she said, with a sad smile and a tilt of the head. "It's a noble ideal." Theirs has been an amicable parting—"We're best buds," she insisted—and Sloss now lives in the lower half of the town house, which the couple bought in 2004 for a little more than five million dollars, while Tucker and their two small children live upstairs. "It's like the perfect bohemian existence, except not," she said.

Tucker recalled that she had disliked Sloss intensely when she first met him, during a dinner at Chasen's, in Los Angeles, twelve years ago. "As I was leaving, I had a premonition that I was going to marry that guy," she said. "I kept trying to shake him. He told a friend of mine that he had fallen 'deeply and irrevocably in love' with me. I am a sucker for romantic gestures—I am Jane Austen's biggest fan." They were married at their farmhouse in Columbia County. "I had my dream wedding," she said. "My flowers were thistles—prickly things. The gift we gave people to take home was a jar of blueberry jam, and on the label it said, 'How do I get out of this jam?' Which was not a very auspicious start. I wore Vivienne Westwood. Richard Linklater's daughter came and read a sonnet. My dog Rosy was in the wedding. She wore a thistle collar. It was very me." Was it also very him, she was asked. Tucker paused. "I have no idea," she said. "Herein lies the problem."

Niederhoffer, who wore a flattering violet-colored gown and teetering black patent pumps, was circulating among her guests with an air of modest gratitude. "The Romantics" is her second novel; her first, "A Taxonomy of Barnacles," has been described by reviewers as a fictionalized chronicle of her experience growing up as the clever, ill-at-ease daughter of the eccentric investor Victor Niederhoffer, who named her for Francis Galton, the Victorian anthropologist and the coiner of the term eugenics. Niederhoffer is thirty-two and is a producer of independent movies as well as a novelist. She lives in a brownstone in Cobble Hill with her partner, Jim Strouse, and their children, Magnolia, three, and Grover, one. Magnolia is named for the West Village bakery

where the couple met. "I was a customer, and he was a trusty icer, recently off the turnip truck," Niederhoffer recalled. "I was a brazen New York JAP, and he was a totally oblivious rube from the Midwest. I picked him up. It was a horribly tawdry beginning. He told me his name was Jim and his brother was Tim, and I thought, He's really from a different planet."

The couple have been engaged since before Niederhoffer was pregnant with Magnolia but have no immediate plans to marry. "I come from the kind of family where marriage has not exactly spelled success," she said. Victor Niederhoffer and his first wife, Gail, divorced after the birth of Galt and her sister Katie; he went on to have four more daughters with his second wife, Susan. Three years ago, he conceived another child with his longtime paramour, Laurel Kenner. "In a way, my book party *is* my wedding,"



Galt Niederhoffer

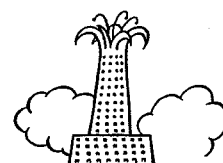
Niederhoffer said. "This is a better thing to aspire to, isn't it? To be celebrated for your intelligence and your talent, rather than for your size-two beauty."

With the sun setting over the Hudson, Niederhoffer, who by now had removed her shoes, like a bride after three hours on the dance floor, gave a toast, offering particular thanks to Kathryn Tucker: "The gorgeous blonde. So glamorous. So lovely." Tucker was still standing effortlessly in her red pumps, in spite of the fact that she hadn't had anything to eat. "It's just like a wedding," she said,

as a waitress came by with an empty tray. "You get drunk and you forget to eat, and you don't have that great a night." The waitress returned with a tray of spring rolls, but Tucker declined, with another tilt of the head and a sorry smile, as if discouraging a suitor with a polite, insincere show of regret.

—Rebecca Mead

BUILDING DEPT. SHAPE-SHIFTER



Architects don't usually hold elaborate press conferences to announce their new designs. But David Fisher is not a typical architect, and not only because he goes by the honorific "Dr." Fisher, who was born in Tel Aviv fifty-nine years ago, is based in Florence, and believes that he has come up with the most innovative concept in architecture since the pyramids. He calls it "Dynamic Architecture," and it includes a plan for an eighty-story skyscraper in which every floor rotates, not in tandem with other floors but on its own. Fisher unveiled his project the other day, in the Grand Ballroom of the Plaza Hotel.

Fisher's building looks something like the torqued towers that have been designed in recent years by established architects like Santiago Calatrava, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and Kohn Pedersen Fox. In Fisher's view, those are just conventional skyscrapers with a slightly different shape. His tower takes on a variety of shapes. When the floors rotate, the tower begins to undulate, and it can look a little like a fourteen-hundred-foot-tall belly dancer.

"I believe that everything should be adjustable to life," Fisher said at breakfast a couple of days before the press conference. "What is right for today may not be right for tomorrow." He turned on a laptop to show a video. To the music from "2001: A Space Odyssey," the narrator intoned, "For the first time, Man will have a building in four dimensions."

At the Plaza, Fisher was introduced by Parker Ladd, the former publishing executive. First, a violinist appeared and played some Vivaldi. Then the "2001"

theme swelled, and you half expected the architect to emerge from a puff of smoke. Instead, Ladd approached the lectern and said, "Esteemed guests, I now present Dr. David Fisher."

Fisher, who has wavy gray hair and was wearing an elegant suit, began by explaining the origins of his design. "Everything started really in New York City, about four blocks from here on Fifth and Fifty-first, the Olympic Tower," he said. Fisher was visiting a friend, and she said to him, "David, did you notice? You can see from here the East River and the Hudson River." He went back to Florence and began to think. He realized that, if every floor could spin, everyone in an apartment tower would have the mixture of views similar to his friend's. Then, to make his building more environmentally sensitive, he left a few feet of space between each floor and put wind turbines there. "The building is completely self-powered," he said. Fisher, whose finished projects have included a prefabricated bathroom unit for hotel rooms, plans to make the apartment units in a factory, have them transported to the site, and then lifted up and attached to a central concrete cylinder that would contain elevators and stairs.

A reporter asked Fisher how the plumbing would work, since all the bathrooms and kitchens are within the rotating part of the building. "You have started with the most difficult question," he said, and explained a scheme in which plumbing within each apartment could attach via flexible pipes to the building's central core at various points as they moved around the circle.

Fisher said that he plans to build the first of his rotating towers in Dubai and the second in Moscow, and that he would like to build a third in New York. Factory production for the Dubai building, he said, would start this summer, and the project would cost roughly seven hundred million dollars. The project is a joint venture between a British company called the Dynamic Architecture Group and a Dubai real-estate company that is connected to the royal family.

Fisher conceded that he had never designed a skyscraper before. But that was just as well. If he had, he said, he "would not have come up with the idea—what you Americans call 'out of the box.'"

—Paul Goldberger

STREETSCAPES FISH STORY



How seldom the native of this, the most vertical of cities, actually turns his head skyward. New Yorkers tend to stare straight ahead or peer downward, the better to avoid strollers, puddles, dog droppings, and panhandlers. For the past few months, though, passersby near the intersection of Bedford and Morton Streets, in the Village, have been spotted with their heads tilted back. The object of their gaze: a large aquarium, visible through a second-story apartment window. The tank glows neon blue, like a sign outside a jazz club. Its tenant is not a goldfish or a guppy but, rather, what Jacques Cousteau called "the splendid savage of the sea." Even from the street corner it is clear: swimming in circles, interminably on the prowl, is a shark. The view, neighbors agree, is mesmerizing: Damien Hirst before the formaldehyde.

The pet shark. Apparently, people do this. Kevin Federline, after marrying Britney Spears, installed a shark tank in their house. ("It's probably like six hundred gallons," he told a reporter. "A flat-screen TV comes up in front of it. It's like a tropical paradise.") Nicolas Cage owned one, as did Ice-T, who reasoned, "All James Bond's best enemies had shark tanks." The former N.B.A. center Matt Geiger has kept sharks in a three-thousand-gallon tank in a house in Florida. The pet shark may be the new pit bull—the mascot of the outsized ego, the Hummer of the living room.

And so, up two flights to meet the big fish. Larry Saul, the apartment's owner, opened the door. Saul is not a rapper or an actor or a basketball star. He is a short, unprepossessing, forty-five-year-old child psychiatrist, with a good-sized paunch and a shock of frizzy white hair. Across the room, his wife, Lynn, who has just received a Ph.D. in psychology, flipped through the *Times*. Their six-year-old daughter, Georgia, played with Bernie, a chocolate poodle. "Sorry to disappoint," Saul said. "You were expecting a bachelor pad, huh? Maybe a rock star?"

The fish, a blacktip reef shark, was caught in Indonesia six months ago and supplied to Saul by his longtime fish guy

("I found him through my stereo-system guy"). Georgia had named it Black Fin. He is more than two feet long, and he glided through his circuits with unnerving ease. He has a snout like the end of a torpedo, and inky eyes, oval and penetrating.

"Put your hand in there and, absolutely, he'd go for it," Saul warned. "A few fingers would be missing." Saul walked to the kitchen and retrieved several pieces of calamari and a few shrimp. Feeding time. "It comes from the Lobster Place," he said. Lynn snorted. "Do you know how expensive the Lobster Place is?"

"I was one of those nerdy kids," Saul recalled, as he clambered up a stepladder and removed the tank's lid. "I was allergic to fur, so I got into collecting newts and salamanders and frogs. I had boa constrictors and pythons. I even had snapping turtles. All four walls of my bedroom were lined with tanks."

Saul dropped the calamari a piece at a time. Black Fin seemed reluctant, dancing around each piece before snapping them all up. The shrimp were for three eels, hidden among rocks on the tank's floor. "Do you see where the eel has a scar?" Lynn asked. "The shark is biting it." The eels hung back, waited till the coast was clear, and then furtively jabbed at their shrimp.

Saul was eager to talk all things fish: cost ("three to four thousand"), other varieties he'd owned ("I had some very rare angelfish, one of which was totally illegal"), mistakes ("We had a green moray that basically ate everything"), and future plans ("It's going to be awesome when we get another two sharks in there"). Lynn, in turn, was eager to deride her husband's habit ("First, you had an aquarium made out of pine that looked like a coffin"; "If you sold that thing, we could get a new car"). Neither, though, would approach the big question: given their professions, what do they think are the psychological motivations for owning a shark? And why the exhibitionism, the tendency not to draw the blinds? Both Sauls laughed. "I slither away from such questions," Larry said. "I let other people analyze that."

Lucky for Saul, the literature speaks little of fish and the human psyche, although Freud, who had prepared for a career in biology, spent 1876 dissecting eels to see if they had testicles. Suddenly, an even bigger question loomed: What does the world have against eels?

—Mike Peed



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ANNALS OF SCIENCE

SURFING THE UNIVERSE

An academic dropout and the search for a Theory of Everything.

BY BENJAMIN WALLACE-WELLS

In June, 2007, a thirty-nine-year-old unemployed physicist named Garrett Lisi arrived at a professional conference in Morelia, Mexico, to give a twenty-minute talk. The conference was attended by all the top researchers in a field called loop quantum gravity, which had emerged as a leading challenger to string theory. Morelia is in a region susceptible to earthquakes, and it occurred to Lisi that if there was an earthquake string theory might predominate for the next twenty years. This thought was not pleasing to him.

Lisi had not been to a professional conference in eight years, and he was anxious about speaking in public. He has since learned that he can conquer this fear if he writes out all his remarks and reads from the script. But he hadn't yet learned that tactic, and so he overcame his nerves by submerging his ideas in a mass of equations.

In the audience was a physicist named Lee Smolin, one of the three founders of the field of loop quantum gravity and a prominent member of the faculty at the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, in Ontario. Smolin had a bad cold that day, and so, through the double fog of his illness and of Lisi's exceedingly technical language, he grasped only the contours of what he was listening to. Lisi believed that he had discovered what physicists call a Theory of Everything—a unifying idea that aims to incorporate all the universe's forces in a single mathematical framework. The Theory of Everything has been the holy grail of theoretical physics for a century; Nobels are won for partial contributions to it. Here was somebody, with no reputation, saying that he might have figured out the key to the whole thing. Within four months, however, and after a second talk, Smolin was telling Lisi that he had “one of the most compelling unification models I've seen in years.”

“There's a dream that underlying the physical universe is some beautiful math-

ematical structure, and that the job of physics is to discover that,” Smolin told me later. “The dream is in bad shape,” he added. “And it's a dream that most of us are like recovering alcoholics from.” Lisi's talk, he said, “was like being offered a drink.”

There is a persistent legend in physics of the hermit genius, the scientist who drops out of academia and then returns, many years later, with an insight that moves the discipline forward. The brilliant outsider has become almost a stock character. David Deutsch, a British pioneer of quantum computer theory, had dropped out of paid academia several years before his theories won wide acclaim. Julian Barbour, whose theories helped pioneer a key physics concept known as background independence, left the university and never returned, holding forth in a farmhouse twenty miles outside Oxford and receiving graduate students as pilgrims. The most famous outsider genius was the patent clerk Albert Einstein. “Look, in my experience, the style of a well-trained Ph.D. going away, thinking hard about something for a long time, and coming back with something very original, something that's a well-worked-out and well-thought-through point of view, is an essential, if rare, part of how theoretical physics progresses,” Smolin said. “Garrett fit the pattern.”

But Lisi, when he arrived in Morelia, was so obscure that he could not think of a single reputable physicist who might recommend him for a job. Einstein at least had a weekly discussion club in Bern, where he muddled through Poincaré and Hume. Lisi had got his Ph.D. from the University of California at San Diego, completing his dissertation on the mathematics of the movement of water over a swimming dolphin's skin, and then, at thirty-one, dropped out of academia and nearly out of society.

For almost a decade, Lisi moved on no

fixed schedule between Maui, where he likes to surf, and the mountains of the West, where he snowboards. Four years ago, Lisi persuaded his girlfriend, Crystal Baranyk, who is an artist, to move with him into an old Colorado ski-shuttle van; he remodelled it himself, shipped it to Maui, and parked it by the beach. They lived in the van for a year, with no toilet. He worked intermittently, sometimes as a snowboard instructor, once on a short-term consulting contract when a friend's software company needed an algorithm solved, but mostly he tried to think about physics. When Lisi arrived in Morelia, it was as if the Sierra Nevada and the physical sciences had joined to produce their own version of Sidd Finch.

"I am forty years old and most of my net worth is in snowboards and surfboards, and that's kind of weird," Lisi said. He wasn't even particularly careful with these items. At one point, he was living in a yurt on a plantation in Maui with some people from the group World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms when he found himself gripped by the urge to snowboard. He had no place to store his surfboards, so he just left them there. When he returned, a year later, he found that a new group had moved into the yurt, discovered the surfboards, and put them to use.

Five months after Morelia, Lisi finally published his theory online, in a thirty-one-page paper called "An Exceptionally Simple Theory of Everything." The paper is hard for a nontechnical reader to penetrate; it consists mostly of equations and boasts. As physicists began to examine Lisi's paper, they found it alternately sublime and just strange.

For half a century, scientists have tried, unsuccessfully, to unify the two governing theories of the physical world: general relativity, which explains the behavior of very large objects, like stars, and quantum mechanics, which precisely describes the phenomena of very small objects, like particles. The two theories are written in distinct mathematical languages, and scientists have not found a way to unify them—a common syntax. This makes it hard to describe certain crossover phenomena, like the horizons of black holes. Most physicists believe that the problem isn't that the universe is incoherent but that there is something missing in the math.

Scientists have long hoped that new experiments in cosmology or particle physics would break this impasse. But discoveries on this scale haven't been forthcoming, and it's not clear that some of the most compelling modern theories can even be tested by experiment. This is particularly true of string theory. The appeal of the theory lies in its high-end

E8. With the publication of his theory, Lisi wandered into a mill of expectations and press attention, in an unusually politicized moment in physics. His supporters include prominent physicists, but some of his antagonists, particularly among string theorists, thought his math was fishy and found the entire episode outrageous. When I asked the Nobel laureate David



Garrett Lisi seemed a model of the hermit genius. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

math, but it also twists the real world in unusual ways. String theorists believe that the world has ten or eleven dimensions, depending on the version of the theory, with the extra ones balled up in "compactifications" too tiny to perceive.

Garrett Lisi, willfully cut loose from the world of academic physics, built his theory as an outsider might, relying on a grab bag of component parts: a hand-built mathematical structure, an unconventional way of describing gravity, and a mysterious mathematical entity known as

Gross, a professor of physics and an influential string theorist at the University of California at Santa Barbara, about Lisi, he said that he was "extremely reluctant to add fuel to this silly story."

But Smolin, after meeting Lisi and talking to him, became convinced that it was at least possible that Lisi had made a fundamental breakthrough. "It is of the nature of a high-risk shot on goal from way down the field," Smolin said. He wondered if a position within the academic world might buy Lisi time to de-

velop his theory and asked if he was interested in applying for a university fellowship. Lisi said no.

In the acknowledgments to “An Exceptionally Simple Theory of Everything,” Lisi begins by thanking a mathematician from Columbia named Peter Woit. The two men had never met, and their only previous interaction was a slim exchange of e-mails that had ended some months earlier, in which Lisi sent Woit a description of the problems he was working on and Woit responded with some general words of encouragement. But in physics the invocation of Woit’s name was a smoke signal, a declaration of partisan affinities. Woit was best known for his zealous one-man campaign to discredit string theory. By thanking him, Lisi had enlisted in the string wars. “It was probably not the most politic thing to do,” Woit said.

Lisi had long harbored a deep skepticism about string theory. As a graduate student in theoretical physics at U.C. San Diego in the nineties, he was briefed on a recent string-theory development called the Maldacena conjecture by a young member of the physics department. “It was very interesting mathematics,” Lisi said. “But I remember walking out of this office and wondering what it had to do with any physical reality. And, as far as I could tell, it didn’t.” The influence of string theorists was growing at the time, and Lisi felt the academy closing in on him. “If you share

an office next to a guy for twenty years, and you like him and you’re friends with him, it’s hard to tell him that you think that his whole idea of how the universe works is completely wrong,” he said. String theory, Lisi had come to believe, was “a mess.”

First during the nineteen-seventies, but with increasing momentum during the eighties, a loose community of physics researchers had begun to postulate that the disparate small particles that we learned about in high-school science class—electrons, for instance—were actually the varied vibrations of tiny open and closed looped strings. String theorists believed that this basic component allowed them to fit all the forces of nature into a single mathematical framework. By 1999, Steven Weinberg, a physicist and Nobel laureate at the University of Texas, could say that string theory was “the only game in town.”

One good way to prove string theory would be to look and see whether strings exist. But the vibrations, according to the hypothesis, take place at a frequency too high for existing equipment to detect. String theorists have still not been able to resolve their equations into testable hypotheses. Instead, they have built their case on the compelling quality of their mathematics, which some find almost incomprehensibly beautiful.

Physicists have long looked to higher math for insights into the workings of the universe. “If a figure is so beautiful and intricate and clear, you figure it must not

exist for itself alone,” John Baez, a professor of mathematics at the University of California at Riverside, said. “It must correspond to something in the physical world.” This instinct—the assumption that beauty will stand in for truth—has become a habit. Some physicists now worry that string theory’s mathematics have grown permanently unmoored from the real world—an exercise in its own complexity. And so modern theoretical physics has become, in part, an argument about aesthetics.

By 2003, a series of papers had suggested that the ambitions of string theory might never be realized—that its equations had a number of possible solutions that neared infinity and could yield only “landscapes” of possible universes. For some, this was devastating. Physicists are scientists, after all, and, thirty years in, they were getting antsy for proof. But for many physicists these papers are far from decisive, and string theory retains much of its allure. “String theory still has great attractions, and there aren’t any alternatives,” Weinberg said. “Well, there are alternatives, but they’re worse.”

In physics, as in politics, the competition is crueller in lean times. “In terms of development of new theories, it has been maybe the slowest period in two centuries,” the science historian Spencer Weart said. By 2006, the fight over string theory had begun to leak out of the scientific community. Smolin and Woit published widely reviewed books criticizing string theory, and *USA Today* published an account of the assault headlined “HANGING ON BY A THREAD?” (There were “lots of bad puns,” Jacques Distler, a high-energy physicist at the University of Texas and a proponent of string theory, told me.)

For the critics, what had begun as an academic question had become a debate about what physics meant and what it should hope to uncover. Some physicists, including the leading theorist Leonard Susskind, concluded that our own universe was only a tiny corner of an unimaginably vast “megaverse,” which contained an almost endless number of universes, each structured according to different laws. In this context, the traditional search for a single Theory of Everything seemed almost quaint.

This was not Lisi’s position. He still had faith in the certainties of science.



“It’s hopeless—we don’t even have the weather in common.”

"The only thing that makes sense," he said, "is if the universe is beautiful and simple and elegant."

Lisi spent this past winter in Incline Village, Nevada, on the less hurried northern lip of Lake Tahoe, in a house he borrowed, rent-free, from a friend. From the deck you can see a sliver of the lake through an opening in the pines. Lisi went snowboarding three or four days a week at nearby Mt. Rose, where a season pass costs three hundred and thirty-three dollars, a comparative bargain. During the afternoons and on the weekends, when the slopes were crowded, he worked on his theory, usually from a beach chair draped with a towel. Crystal Baranyk often painted at an easel a few feet away. Lisi had become accustomed to the curious cadences of the resort—roaring with wealth a few weekends a year, its vast houses empty and silent the rest of the time.

As outdoorsmen go, Lisi is a creature not of adventure but of submissive, mind-clearing habit. He will ski the same slopes and surf the same break, morning after morning, for a whole season. When Lisi encounters a physicist of his own age whose skill he envies, he reminds himself that he is a better surfer. When he comes across a better surfer, he thinks, I'm much better at equations.

Last summer, when Lisi began to meet with physicists, they were struck by his personality, which is self-deprecating and ironic and not particularly hermitlike. "He has this enormous self-confidence, together with an unpretentiousness, which is indicative of someone who knows what he's doing," Smolin said. Lisi is stocky, handsome, and youthful-looking, with a shaved head and the same stubby-faced bulldog Italian look as the celebrity chef Tom Colicchio. He is a great admirer of the Myers-Briggs personality test, and believes that its assessment of him—INTP, or introversion, intuition, thinking, perceiving—is definitive. Lisi has spent most of his adult life as a libertarian but now considers himself somewhat more liberal than that. He is a committed atheist. He likes puns. Lisi doesn't do any drugs or even drink; alcohol feels "like poison" to him. He makes a point of attending the post-hippie festival Burning Man. Although he returns to Maui and

Tahoe regularly, his social networks, locally, are slim. The weekend I visited, Lisi and Baranyk were getting ready for a party in Reno, forty minutes away, to which they'd been invited by someone Lisi met on a ski lift, and for which they were dressing up as giant rabbits. But most nights they stayed in and cooked. They sometimes watched videotapes of the British science-fiction show "Doctor Who," but they preferred board games. It is hard to meet Lisi without wondering why someone with so many social gifts, someone who so palpably enjoys the company of others, would choose to isolate himself so thoroughly.

When Lisi finished graduate school, he wanted to work on spinor fields, mathematical representations of particles like electrons, which had conventionally been expressed algebraically but Lisi thought might plausibly be expressed in more geometric terms. He could not find an established postdoctoral program that matched his research interests, however. In part, he believes, this was ideological: he was surrounded by string theorists. He briefly considered going to work outside physics, and interviewed with McKinsey, but the company was considering him for its office in Los Angeles, a city he didn't care for. So he dropped out. His father, a probate attorney and a former Navy fighter pilot, in Escondido, California, and his stepmother were concerned. (His mother died when he was a baby.) His exile was, at first, conditional: if McKinsey had asked him to move to San Francisco, he might have gone. Six months later, he was in Hawaii, paying minimal rent to live in a house on the grounds of the Sudbury Maui school, where the children study independently. He spent some time encouraging a pupil who wanted to study the physics of baseball.

Lisi didn't think that he would ever return to academic physics. "It's publish or perish, and I figured I was perishing," he said. He became accustomed to working in isolation, in air-conditioned public libraries, or in spare rooms at home, when he had a home. There were times when he lived in mansions near Colorado ski slopes, house-sitting. At other times, he pitched a tent in a friend's backyard. He always figured, he told me, "that my brain wouldn't let me starve." But he was hardly thriving.

Lisi's working life was not steady, or

easy. "Ninety-five per cent of my time is virtually wasted," he said. "If I were in a university, one of my colleagues would say, 'No, that direction makes no sense—other people have looked into it, and it doesn't go anywhere.' Here no one stops me." He spent weeks searching for a reliable place to work, and months on projects he later discarded. Sometimes he felt like a crazy person, walking down the pier in Santa Monica and muttering equations out loud.

But Lisi felt more and more that his isolated position had its advantages and might improve his chances of achieving something significant. He was convinced that academic physics had a bias against pursuing foundational questions at a young age, both because of the need to publish in order to get tenure and because such questions were seen as pretentious. And there was also, he believed, a bias toward string theory.

In 2002, three years out of graduate school, Lisi published a paper online. He described a way of formulating spinor fields in terms of geometric constructions known as Clifford bundles. Clifford bundles rely on a mathematical language developed by William Kingdon Clifford—a Victorian savant who wrote children's stories about fairies—which is useful for describing rotations. (Today, its formulas are used heavily in computer graphics.) The paper didn't make much of a mark. But Lisi felt that he had caught a glimpse of something bigger.

He wondered if his formulas might be expanded, so that he could use Clifford bundles to express the strong, weak, and electromagnetic forces. To others in the field, this would have seemed an odd exercise, like translating the Constitution into Esperanto and then expecting the new text to illuminate the law. But to Lisi it seemed revelatory. He began playing with a thirty-year-old description of gravity, the MacDowell-Mansouri approach, that fit well with Clifford bundles. What seemed to be correspondences appeared: particles and forces that he had previously thought of as wholly distinct blended together neatly when described using Clifford algebra. Lisi was seduced by the coincidences: there seemed to be a deep coherence in it somewhere. But he had also begun to recognize the closing down of possibility that comes with age.

By 2005, when Lisi published his next

Clifford-bundle paper online, he was broke, and he and Baranyk talked about whether he should take a job teaching physics at a community college. The paper attracted little notice. But it did help land him a grant, a \$38,640 check each year for two years, from a nonprofit group that funded foundational investigations in physics. Lisi was excited, but also frustrated. He hadn't been able to fully describe his theory geometrically, and it wasn't comprehensive. In the standard model, many particles have two related particles, the so-called second and third generations, and he hadn't been able to include those. "I had this algebraic structure worked out, but I didn't know what the hell it was." For a year, Lisi said, "I scratched my head" and tried to figure it out.

One morning in May, 2007, Lisi woke up early and sat down with his laptop. Baranyk was still asleep. He began scrolling through Web sites that described topics in mathematical physics. He found a post, from 1996, in which a University of California professor had described the properties of mathematical structures known as exceptional Lie groups, among them E8.

E8 is famous in physics. The exceptional Lie groups had been classified in the nineteenth century by Wilhelm Killing, a German professor who joined the Franciscan order, as a way of describing higher-level symmetries. A circle has one degree of symmetry; a sphere has three; a space whose symmetries are described by E8 has two hundred and forty-eight. One rough way to imagine it is as a dense and precisely symmetrical cloud of spiderweb, with thousands of threads exploding out from hubs of concentric spheres. The equations that encode its inner structure, if printed in small type, would cover an area the size of Manhattan. During the nineteen-seventies and eighties, physicists had turned to E8 and a family of similar groups with great excitement (a major version of string theory makes use of E8). "It is like a diamond with tens of thousands of facets," Bertram Kostant, an emeritus professor of math at M.I.T., said. "It is easy to arrive at the feeling that a final understanding of the universe must somehow involve E8, or, otherwise put, nature would be foolish not to utilize E8."

Lisi began reading the description of E8's structure and had a flash of recogni-

tion: the figure matched his mass of algebra precisely. "I saw that it fit. And saw it and immediately walked around the room, thinking of all the different ways that this thing fit together. And it was going to work." As Lisi went through the numbers, he discovered, with a sudden thrill, that you could plot all the universe's components on E8: each of those particles would correspond with one of its symmetries. It was as if a beachcomber, having spent years collecting driftwood, had suddenly realized that the pieces made up a complete shipbuilding kit.

Lisi was overcome. "I'm literally tingling with excitement," he said. "I had to suppress that in order to think more about the actual algebraic structure. You cannot think when you're ecstatic." He added, "I didn't run through the snow shouting 'Eureka!' or anything like that." By the end of the day, Lisi was convinced that he had stumbled onto a Theory of Everything.

It took Lisi six months to work through the idea. He matched every photon, gluon, weak boson, graviton, Higgs boson, quark, neutrino, and electron, in each of the first, second, and third generations—every particle in the standard model—to symmetries of E8. He found that E8 had twenty more symmetries than the standard model had particles, and concluded that they indicated particles yet to be discovered. This led to a greater symmetry: on the terrain of E8, general relativity and particle physics were no longer out of joint. Lisi had his map for the universe.

Lisi saw the theory as a brief for non-absurdity in physics, and for accessibility. "Just our four dimensions, not ten, not eleven," he said. "No strings. No tiny curled-up dimensions. Just the world that you see."

For the first time since graduate school, Lisi started attending conferences. He went to Mexico, and then, in

July, to a conference in Iceland, which drew a documentary film crew. "I'm walking around with this card that says 'I'm Garrett Lisi and I'm working on a T.O.E.,'" he said. It didn't get him much attention. He thought, as he walked past the film crew, "If you guys knew what I was up to, you'd want to talk to me."

In the early nineteen-nineties, a physicist at Los Alamos named Paul Ginsparg had an idea for a better way to spread new findings in the field. Publishing in peer-reviewed journals took months. To compensate, scientists would copy papers they submitted and mail them off to colleagues, a process that was costly, slow, and limiting. Ginsparg created an online database of papers that, by 1999, had become known as arXiv. ArXiv uses moderators to look briefly at posted papers and make sure they're in the correct topical forum, but it is otherwise largely unrefereed. Scientists are proud of arXiv for eliminating barriers in the discipline: relevant contributions come more frequently from scientists in places like Iran, India, and Turkey.

In recent years, as science reporters and interested amateurs have turned to arXiv—and as some physics personalities have started blogs—the audience for physics has both expanded and fragmented. "I know for a fact that many of the leading figures in the field read the blogs, but so do high-school science students," Woit, the Columbia mathematician and string-theory critic, said. "The scary thing is how frequently you can't tell which is which." The leading blogs have readerships that, while including some loud dissenters, tend to align with the perspectives of their authors—Distler, of the University of Texas, has a blog that attracts many string theorists and enthusiasts, while Woit's blog draws more skeptics. It works somewhat in the way the blogosphere operates in politics. Andreas Albrecht, a physics professor at the University of California at Davis, said that the blogs had opened physics to a new sort of populism, one that the academic establishment had to figure out how to manage. "It just pushes those buttons," Albrecht said. "There's some really good stuff, but a lot of really sloppy stuff." What you have, in other words, is the erosion of the referee and the rise of a scientific underclass.

These are Garrett Lisi's people. Last



November, he posted his theory on arXiv. At first, it attracted little attention, though it did garner a certain amount of string-theorist scorn. A week later, a reporter at *New Scientist* (whose editor, as it turned out, had noticed Lisi in Iceland) published an enthusiastic piece on the paper, supported by a quote from Smolin; a science writer at the *Telegraph* immediately picked up the story, and wondered if Lisi might be the next Einstein. Hundreds of thousands of readers who had never logged on to arXiv before downloaded Lisi's paper. The more attention Lisi received, the more aggressive his opponents on the Internet became. "Every high school senior excited about physics should be able to see that the paper is just a long sequence of childish misunderstandings," Lubos Motl, a Czech physicist, wrote. "I understood these things when I was 14."

Lisi had hoped that physicists would be excited about his ideas. "It's been the best I could have hoped for. When I gave these talks, all the people whom I respected the most really liked it." What he hadn't expected was that other people would be interested, too. Lisi found himself the subject of profiles in science magazines and in *Surfer*. *Discover* asked, "Could the Next Einstein Be a Surfer Dude?" and—again with Smolin's endorsement—listed him as one of "six top candidates" for that title. French science reporters seemed particularly taken with his theories, though Lisi found some of his interviews with them unnervingly surreal. There was a segment on a Fox affiliate, for which Lisi insisted that his parents, who are conservatives, be interviewed, and an invitation to appear on "Jimmy Kimmel Live," which he declined. To his disbelief and pleasure, he was invited to speak at TED, an influential, invitation-only four-day technology conference in Monterey. (The TED curator, Chris Anderson, told me, "Not everyone understood him, but it still came over as pretty amazing.") At a TED cocktail gathering, a man near Lisi nudged his wife and said, "That's Garrett Lisi." Glad to be recognized, Lisi introduced himself. The man was Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay.

A few days after the paper appeared on arXiv, Jacques Distler, the Texas string theorist, decided to look into Lisi's theory. Distler had tried to ignore the



"Vote for me, and the baby lives."

fuss, but eventually concluded that he couldn't. He told me, "I had the strong impression that the people writing those posts had not read the paper."

First, he thought, Lisi hadn't clearly specified which form of E8 he was using. And there was a second problem, which seemed more serious. Lisi had used a mathematical trick to incorporate the second and third generations of particles into his model. Lisi admitted, in his original paper, that this was a weakness, and that the math was what he calls "hand-waving." He saw his work on the second and third generations as provisional—certain calculations were still being worked out. He had already planned to spend the next months refining the fit. But to Distler it was damning.

In private e-mail conversations, Distler prodded Lisi for more detail. Lisi told me that he found the string theorist provocative and polite, and that he welcomed the questions about his theory. "My job should be to try to find problems with it," Lisi said. On his Web site, Distler was less collegial; the more he looked, the more fundamental problems he saw. "Not only can one never hope to get 3 generations out of this 'Theory of Everything,' he wrote; "it appears that one can't even get *one*."

Part of the reason Lisi had such a following, Distler thought, was that some well-known physicists who were skeptics of string theory—Smolin and others—had "waxed enthusiastic" about him when reporters had called, and this triggered a

cascade. "One can't deny that the particular romance of this surfer dude played a part," Distler said.

Lisi's ideas leaned on several mathematical concepts heavily used in the loop-quantum-gravity community, and his project, if proved right, offered the prospect that their calculations might be expanded to encompass not just gravity but all the forces of nature. As quotes from Smolin and some other leading physicists, testifying to their excitement about Lisi's theory, continued to appear in the press, it began to seem—to some string theorists, at least—that there was mutual opportunism embedded in all the awe: here was a surfer in search of credibility and a movement in search of a poster boy.

At the beginning of March, Lisi drove from Lake Tahoe to U.C.-Davis to give a talk on his theory to a seminar on quantum gravity. Looking around the campus, Lisi said, "It looks nice. If you're visiting, you think, Wow, I could just hang here for a while and soak in some knowledge. A lot of people do play it that way, but those people tend to be students. Researchers tend to be very stressed out." A couple of minutes later, he amended his judgment. "It is a really good life, and there are moments when I miss it."

A full crowd of thirty or so students and professors gathered in the seminar room. Lisi had illustrated the presentation with an animated diagram of E8, its points flexing in correspondence

with the particles, which were represented as bright-colored points on a black background, like the children's game Lite-Brite.

"As a physicist, I have a fairly obvious question," a bearded professor said.

"The Coleman-Mandula theorem, right? Wait a second," Lisi said. He'd prepared a slide to deal with this very question. The students and the professors seemed less than satisfied, but the exchange was friendly enough. (Later, when I asked him about another professor's question, Lisi was less patient. "A string theorist," he said, dismissively.)

After the session, as the professors left the room, a small group of students began to cluster around Lisi. He told them how he had lived, on the cheap, in Maui. One of the students, a tall, commanding kid with a bush of curly hair, had relatives on Maui, and they talked about the rates that the shipping companies charged and how to game that system. Lisi, dispensing wisdom, looked a type: the bald, younger-than-his-years California guru. I've never seen him happier.

Yet, even among the early enthusiasts for Lisi's ideas, there have been some defections. "I am now convinced his theory doesn't work," David Ritz Finkelstein, an emeritus professor of physics at the Georgia Institute of Technology, said. Finkelstein had earlier told *New Scientist* that "some incredibly beautiful stuff falls out of" Lisi's theory. And while others were still confident about the sweeping nature of his theory, some were making the lesser claim that even if Lisi couldn't fix the math, his novel approach to E8 could yield insights into the universe's basic makeup. The thrill was modulated, but it wasn't gone.

Kostant, the M.I.T. professor, is unaffiliated in the string wars. "Columbus made mistakes and thought he was in India. Lisi made a few errors, but this pales in significance to his possibly opening up a whole new world for exploration," Kostant said. "E8 is like North America, South America, and the Pacific Ocean rolled into one. No one in Europe knew anything about it." Lisi's "daring," Kostant said, "possibly creates an agenda for scientists for the next hundred years or more."

Smolin, who had been so instrumental in ushering Lisi's ideas into the

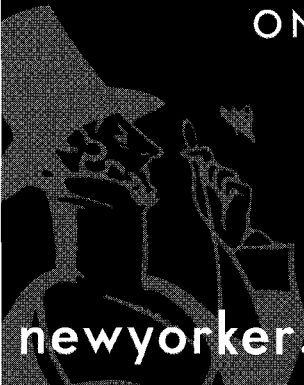
public square, expressed regret that they had arrived there before they were fully formed. He found himself pleading for some time and space for Lisi, to allow him to revise and complete his theory—to give it the attention it warranted. "Then we can know: has Garrett made a really great discovery, or was it a miss?"

Part of Lisi's charm is his all-terrain bonhomie. But his fortieth birthday, in January, coincided with some dark thoughts. His body had become slower to recover from injury and stiffer at times, which was a big deal for someone who had arranged his life, more or less, around exactly how good it felt to move. He began to feel a set of responsibilities—to the broader physics community and to those who had supported him, but also to fully extending his ideas. Lisi had long fantasized about opening a "science hostel," a big empty house in a beautiful place, like Tahoe, where scientists would gather to do research. He began to think that, somehow, the attention he'd been getting might help to make the hostel a possibility. Last May, Lisi headed to the Perimeter Institute, for a stint as a visiting researcher. A year ago, he wouldn't have even thought of returning to academia, but he had begun to consider it.

This summer near Geneva, the Large Hadron Collider, the most powerful machine of its kind ever built, will be turned on, and begin smashing protons into one another. It will take years for the data to be analyzed, but rumors of the results will leak out and find their way onto the Internet. The L.H.C. contains the aspirations of several camps of particle physicists, who hope that it will offer some confirmation for their theories. Lisi will join them. His theory is still incomplete—missing, for example, a satisfying link to the second and third generations. But it makes predictions about particles that the L.H.C. might discover: new versions of the Higgs boson, for one.

Lisi had recently listened to a talk by an expert on E8, and he now believed that one of its alternate forms might be a better fit for the universe. He showed me a pad on which he was trying to work out the math. I asked him if there would still be twenty missing particles. No, he said. "There will be more." ♦

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FOURTEEN PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE APPETIZERS

BY YONI BRENNER

1. Top thick slices of country bread with fresh goat cheese. Sprinkle with herbs and bake until crusty, serve to everyone but Jeff.

2. Vegetarian friends? Try veggie ru-maki: wrap a strip of imitation bacon around a water chestnut, spear with a toothpick, and broil—but instead of imitation bacon use real bacon, and instead of a water chestnut use veal.

3. Steal Cheryl's famous potato-salad recipe. When Cheryl asks, "Why did you steal my recipe?," say, "I don't know, Cheryl, why did you break my heart?" Then laugh so she knows you're just kidding.

4. Blend fresh crabmeat with diced avocado, scallions, and a dollop of mayonnaise for a canapé topping so delicious that it will take your guests a full minute to realize that they're eating it off dog biscuits. Once they catch on, act mortified and stammer that you must have "mixed up the boxes," until everyone calms down. Then start crying because the biscuits remind you that today marks exactly eight weeks since you had to put down Buster, and you just miss him so much.

5. Tell Marissa that you appreciate her concern, but in the two years since Cheryl broke off the engagement you've grown up a lot, and you're really in a much healthier place now. Then say, "Speaking of fiancés, how's Peter's alcoholism?" (Note: This is not technically an appetizer.)

6. For a taste of the U.K., fry up mini-servings of fish-and-chips. Take it to the next level by wrapping them in small pieces of newspaper, which, oddly enough, all seem to be printed with unfavorable reviews of Jeff's novel.

7. Have you ever noticed how sun-dried tomatoes and top-grade peyote look

exactly the same? Not a suggestion, really. Just saying.

8. Another one for the vegetarians. If they think they like tofu, wait until they sample your delicious mock tofu—all you need is chicken fat, puréed pork loin, and five cups of piping-hot tallow. Cheryl will never know the difference.

9. Tempura makes great finger food, and the batter locks the flavor of just about anything in a savory, opaque crust. Impress your friends with creative choices, from squash blossoms to mislaid car keys to the two-carat engagement ring that Cheryl gave back to you after she "reassessed things." Surprise!

10. Guests getting antsy? Head them off with a big bowl of steamed mussels. No one can resist mussels, not even emotionally stunted ex-fiancées and their new poorly-received-novelist boyfriends. Besides, disappearing into the kitchen will give you a chance to collect your thoughts and also to go slash Jeff's tires.

11. Homemade sugared almonds make the perfect sendoff, sure to please all your guests, even the ones who would be bludgeoning you with a tire iron if Peter weren't standing between you. Good old Peter. He may not be the brightest or the handsomest person, but he's very large.

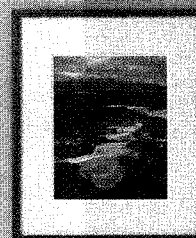
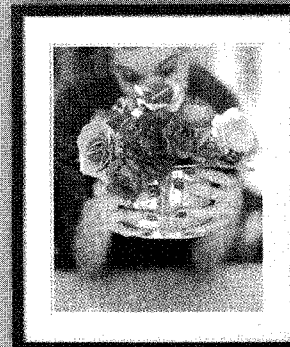
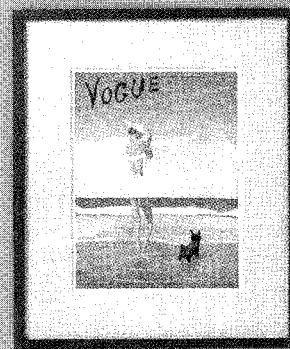
12. As the party disperses, your guests might seem a little ungrateful, calling you an obsessive sociopath or pelting you with sugared almonds. Don't worry, it's probably the peyote talking. Just stand on the porch as their cars pull out, your eyes brimming with tears, and shout, "You know, I try, I really do..."

13. Add, "My dog died! He died! And he's never coming back!"

14. Hepatitis! (Note: This is not technically an appetizer.) ♦

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BUY SHANGHAI!!

A city for sale.

BY PATRICIA MARX

New York may be the city that never sleeps, but Shanghai doesn't even sit down, and not just because there is no room. Things move fast in this town which is both new and old, Western and Eastern, Adidas and Adidos, Adadis, Admimas, Daiads, and Odidoss. Blink, and another lane lined with hundred-year-old *shikumen*—each a home to

Tower, Lady Liberty's headpiece, and the spiny back of a stegosaurus. Don't breathe! The air is smelly with garbage juice. The sun, if visible at all, seems dimmer than the full moon on a hazy night. Need more light? You can see everything better after dusk, when the lunatic neon is switched on. Sh-h-h. High-school students are taking the

remain affordable. A triple strand of freshwater pearls at Lily's Pearl Store (First Asia Jewelry Plaza, Room 3021) cost me 85 yuan, or roughly the same as you'd pay for three tall mochas at Starbucks.

The Chinese are no slouches when it comes to capitalism. After the death of Chairman Mao, in 1976, the Communist slogan "Look to the Future" ("*Xiang Qian Kan*") was morphed by the people into "Look to the Money," because the words for "money" and "future" sound the same but are written differently. (During my visit, the dollar could be exchanged for 6.9 yuan, and that rate is used here, rounded to the dollar. By the time you read this, however, Americans might be better off bringing along



There are markets for birds, fish, and flowers, and streets dedicated to lamps, buttons, adhesive tape, silk, and hair products.

handfuls of families—is bulldozed. In its place, here comes a high-rise rising higher than the one put up yesterday, a clothesline and an illegal satellite dish poking out from each window (a twenty-eight-hundred-square-foot four-bedroom, four-bathroom rental at the luxurious Richgate: \$8,572 a month). Shanghai has the world's fastest intra-city train, largest skateboard park, longest laundry chute (running from the Hyatt hotel's eighty-seventh floor to its basement), and, based on my observations, the least number of seat belts. Look up. The assorted finials on the tops of skyscrapers will make you think of a bottle opener, a Jell-O mold, a crown roast, a bamboo steamer, a chuppah, a Möbius strip, a snake that's swallowed some golf balls, the Eiffel

college-entrance exams. No honking or construction work within a hundred metres of a testing site—by local ordinance.

Shortly before leaving for Shanghai, I e-mailed a friend who lives there and asked if she wanted anything from the States. "No need," she wrote. "Chances are, any item you would bring from there is made here." I packed light and carried a big duffel. I knew I wouldn't be the first to pillage this town, but, unlike the British East India Company, I wasn't planning to pay with opium. (In 1850, it was about as valuable as gold.)

What I did have in my wallet was the American greenback, and, despite its flume ride vis-à-vis the yuan, the Chinese have made sure that their wares

opium instead of cash.) And here's something that would have pleased Deng (Show Me the Money) Xiaoping. During my stay, I was asked three times if I was related to Groucho—not one inquiry about Karl.

"You can do business with them," Helen Noh, a Korean who lives in Shanghai, said, referring to the Chinese. "But you should realize that, in the end, they are always going to win." Noh, who represents designers like Diane von Furstenberg and Donna Karan, and I were at an open-air antique market on Dong Tai Road, surveying the booth of a shirtless, Buddha-shaped man who relentlessly chanted the phrase "old, very old" and then gestured to a box of twenty identical sparkling teapots. Or did he

ARNOLD ROTH

mean us? Anything more than a century old is marked with a red seal and cannot be taken out of the country without an export license, but that wasn't a problem at this man's booth. While I wandered off to another nook and admired a delicately embroidered red shoe no longer than five inches and supposedly worn a hundred years ago by a full-grown woman (\$26), Noh negotiated with a vender over the price of a swatch of vintage fabric. Hagglng is expected in all but the swankiest of shops and can lead to a discount as high as seventy or eighty per cent. After a bit of dickering, Noh acquired seven beautiful pillow-size pieces of hand-dyed appliquéd cotton for \$406, about sixty-five per cent off the sticker price.

There are markets for everything in Shanghai, including crickets. These come in varieties meant for competitive fighting (gambling is illegal in mainland China, but nobody tattles) and for keeping as pets, but probably not for sneaking through customs (405 Xizang Road; \$1.45 to \$14.50 per bug, but some fetch more than \$1,000). There are markets for birds, fish, and flowers, as well as entire streets dedicated to light fixtures, buttons, adhesive tape, silk, hair products, and toilets. Actually, toilets take up several streets.

I visited a three-story indoor fabric market (South Bund Soft-Spinning Material Market, 399 Lu Jia Bang Road) with Lin Lin Mai, a Kewpie-doll-cute twenty-eight-year-old with an eighteen-inch waist, a perfect pageboy haircut, a dot of hot-pink rouge on each cheek, green racing stripes on her fingernails, and a tattoo representing a crop circle on her back. Mai's company, Jellymon, designs clothing, urban collectibles, record albums, posters, and art installations. She has also consulted for Nike and Coca-Cola and wants to start a cosmetics line.

"In my generation, there's a lot of desperation to be different, to be an individual," she told me, as we squeezed past stalls, each one indistinguishable from the next, each crammed with rolls of silk, linen, cotton, wool, leather, or fur. We came to her favorite stall, No. 237, where a tailor makes clothes for her based on sketches she does on the spot. She said, "Because we were only children, we grew up the center of attention

in our families and now we want the attention of society. I think that's why handmade, one-of-a-kind, standout clothes are so popular now." On Mai's recommendation, I chose two men's shirting fabrics—a blue-and-white striped oxford and a Mao-red broadcloth—and had my measurements taken. The tailor whipped up a snappy little dress to Mai's specifications and delivered it to my hotel three days later. I wore it to an appointment with Francine Martin, an American who leads shopping tours of Shanghai, to sites recondite and renowned (www.eastofthesun-asia.com). "Thirty-three dollars?" she said. "Very nice, but one should never pay more than twenty dollars for a simple custom-made dress." (Stall 237 also makes men's shirts of Egyptian cotton for \$15, but Martin probably knows where they can be had for \$10.)

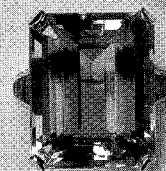
You don't have to spend much time in Shanghai before you start to get all existential about the meaning of authenticity. Did you know that Shanghai is building nine satellite towns, each designed to mimic the architecture and culture of a different country? Faux Scandinavia has Nobel Science and Technology Park. Thames Town has Tudor houses, cobblestoned streets, and a statue of Churchill. Plans for a Canadian Maple Town had palm trees and a bridge with Roman columns. Hmm.

Who's to say that the replica isn't better than the original? Such was the case with the brown quilted leather jacket lined in chartreuse silk that I'd bought on sale years ago at the Madison Avenue branch of Shanghai Tang, a Chinese company based in Hong Kong (600 Madison Avenue). In less than a week, the copycat in Stall 319 at the South Bund Soft-Spinning Material Market had produced an identical version for me in black quilted leather with puce lining (approximately \$200; a similar coat at Shanghai Tang today, \$1,490).

Jessica Chen, a sage in her twenties who owns a Shanghai cashmere label, told me, "In Los Angeles, they have real Birkin bags and fake boobs. In Shanghai, it's the other way around." If you ask a hotel concierge, you'll be told the address of a lane house on South Shanxi Road, purveyors of the finest in fraudulence. There, according to the

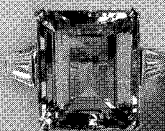
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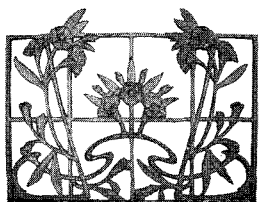
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staff, N.B.A. players, including Yao Ming, shop for knockoff leather goods, and Celine Dion recently bought fifty handbags. George Washington probably slept there, too. This establishment is so hush-hush that a uniformed guard is stationed nearby to keep a lookout for the police, and it is so up to date that when a customer asked whether the shop carried a certain Gucci hobo bag she was dismissively informed that the article was last year's model (\$58 for belts and wallets; \$435 for a blue-sheared mink jacket).

Not everyone is selling fakes. In "cabbage shops" all over town (so called because the merchandise "fell off a truck"), you can get bargains on factory rejects and overruns. Of course, you can also get skirts with zippers that are as reliable as the F train. A pleasant boutique called Quan seems to have an impressive share of the former (733 Julu Road).

Shanghai is the largest city in China, and I think I may have interviewed all 18.15 million residents to find out how their city stacks up against the capital, Beijing (pop. 17 million).

Some of the responses: "Women in Shanghai are flashier, more dolled up." "Beijing looks down on Shanghai for wanting only money." "In Shanghai, they say, 'I'll find it cheaper,' whereas in Beijing it's 'I want it in every color.'" "There are more foreigners here. We have an Italian restaurant next to a Moroccan restaurant." "A Shanghai would rather buy a new pair of shoes than a ticket to the ballet." "Beijing style is edgier, more avant-garde." "Beijing's short and wide. Shanghai's tall and compact." "Shanghai is more refined. More attention to detail." "Shanghai's female, Beijing's male." "Shanghai is New York. Beijing is Washington, D.C." "Shanghai is New York. Beijing is L.A." "Shanghai is Tel Aviv. Beijing is Jerusalem." "Beijing is China. Shanghai is Shanghai."

Until twenty-five years ago, it was practically unheard of for citizens to own property in China. By 2007, however, *The Economist* reported that eighty per cent of the urban population had become homeowners. So a lot of nesters suddenly have a need for a lot of dining-room sets and salad tongs

and scented candles. Yes, there is an IKEA, and it is wildly popular (585 Longhua Xi Road). "But they don't have silver furniture," I was told by Yue-Sai Kan, whose home-decorating mini department store, House of Yue-Sai, opened late last year. Kan has been called the Martha Stewart/Oprah/Emily Post/Estée Lauder of China. Perhaps you know Kan's cosmetics line? Or "One World," her weekly television show, which was seen by an estimated three hundred million people? When I visited the House of Yue-Sai, there was a wide range of ornate pillows from India and China, a stunning Modigliani-esque painting of the back of a Chinese woman's head by the French painter Christian de Laubadère, and a fanciful orange-and-black parasol (15-19 West Beijing Road; \$72, \$7,246, \$84).

At Jane's Home—actually Stall 130 in another fabric bazaar, the Shi-LiuPu Cloth Market (surely you don't think there's just *one* of anything in Shanghai)—Jane is nowhere in sight, but Kelly is there to remind you how much more the same merchandise would cost down the block at Shanghai Tang. Any knickknack knockoff that can possibly be sewn out of silk brocade is piled high in this cubbyhole of a shop—cosmetics pouches (\$4), wallets and change purses (\$2), eyeglass cases (\$2), business-card holders (\$4), envelopes for packing shirts in suitcases (\$20), shoe bags (\$3), and loads more. But my favorite items are the bottle openers—shiny lacquered metal disks decorated with colorful Chinese-opera face masks (\$2) (168 Dongmen Road).

The worst deal in town for anyone carrying U.S. dollars can be found at Plaza 66 and Three on the Bund, two shopping centers where every European designer whose apparel you've ever coveted has a boutique—Marni, Armani, Hugo Boss. They're the real McCoy, but steer clear unless you're packing euros or are one of China's more than forty billionaires, the richest being a woman.

And the best deal? The underground eyeglass market near the railway station. In this bazaar, jam-packed with booths, you can get a pair of stylish, albeit no-name frames, complete with

lenses ground to your prescription—all for a negotiated price of about \$22.

Speaking of vision, the Shanghai government gives tax breaks to blind masseurs, who, according to many locals, provide the best and cheapest kneading in town (Feining Massage Center of Blind Persons, 597 Fu Xing Road; Song Song Massage Center, 6 Da Pu Road; Jing Xuan Blind Man's Massage, 674 Yi Shan Road). A forty-five-minute foot massage is about \$8; a forty-five-minute body massage is about \$14. Based on the foot massage I endured, though, I'd recommend that you first learn the Chinese words for "Ow, not so hard." I cannot tell you the name of my masseur, because, in keeping with Chinese custom, service people are identified only by number.

The Chinese went to the trouble of inventing porcelain, so the least we can do is shop for it. Remember, in "Measure for Measure," when Pompey says, "They are not China dishes, but very good dishes"? Some scholars interpret this to mean that Shakespeare loved to rummage through the pottery warehouse at 457 Fang Bang Road for bogus Ming blanc-de-Chine plates and ersatz celadon vases from the Song dynasty (from \$7). Methinks, however, that he was trying to say he preferred the creatively proportioned and reasonably priced ceramics at the austere appointed shop Spin (758 Julu Road, Building No. 3). A bowl with delicate holes on one side looks like it could be the work of artful moths (\$11). A block of plaster is cleverly chiselled so as to partially reveal its inner vase of pale green (in three sizes: \$10, \$70, \$84). A large round white charger decomposes into sectional plates and resembles a jigsaw puzzle of a pizza (\$928).

At the Yu Garden Jiang Nan Silk Center, you can watch artisans turn cocoons into silk thread. But the truly miraculous thing is the way they managed to compress all the silk quilts I bought into a parcel practically the size of a box of matzo (125 Jiu Xiao Chang Road, but find it with someone who knows this part of town, as the address is used by dozens of shops surrounding the Yu Garden; \$55 to \$116, depending on weight).

Never mind that there is all the tea

in China at the Tianshan market (520 Zhongshan Xi Road); the truth is, after a few days I started to get tired of wrangling for phenomenal deals. So I was relieved to be taken to Song Fang, a serene, French-owned tea house with non-negotiable prices and a collection of tea caddies painted to look like they are from the Cultural Revolution (227 Yongjia Road; \$12 to \$46 for 50 grams). The tearoom upstairs, decorated with bamboo bird-cages used as lanterns, has free wireless Internet access. After checking your e-mail, you can take a stroll in the French Concession. In the mid-nineteenth century, this neighborhood was granted to the French for them to live in, govern, and do with whatever they pleased. Much of what pleased them took place in brothels and shall go undescribed here. (A hundred and forty years ago, the price of a hooker tended to be ten times the price of a haircut.) Today, the chic enclave has boulevards lined with leafy plane trees imported from Europe in the nineteenth century, plenty of fresh baguettes, shops that stay open until ten, and a beauty parlor called Yuppies Hair Salon.

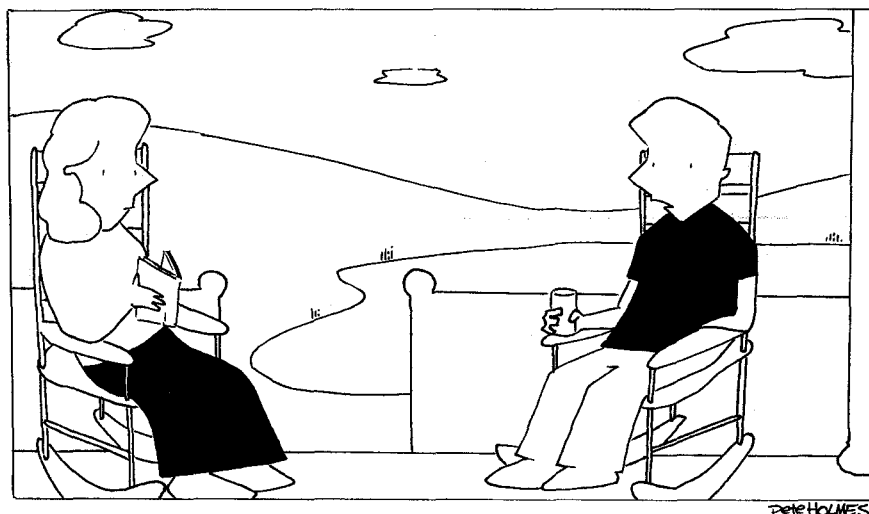
In what was formerly a candy factory on Taikang Road and spilling out into the surrounding alleys, there are a number of hip boutiques. I was enthralled with the collection in a shop called Jaohh, especially a white cotton jersey dress with an attached asymmetrical brown-and-white checked linen vest (Shop 47, Lane 248; \$87). At Jooi, a polyester Rooney the Rat

bag—so called in honor of the year of that rodent—is pretty nifty, too (Shop 3, Lane 210; \$33).

The astonishingly encyclopedic selection of bootleg DVDs and boxed sets at a little outlet called Movie World are a genuine steal (378 Dagou Road). Across the street is Even Better Than Movie World, which is true to its name (407 Dagou Road). You can pick up a collection of the Coen brothers' oeuvre, seasons one to three of "Lost," or just about any other movie or TV show ever shown or about to be shown (\$7, \$22, \$1 to \$2). Before you start thinking about setting up a nice little DVD-import business from your home office, though, note this: the United States Customs and Border Protection allows returning travellers to bring into the country only one counterfeit/gray-market article "of each type."

I have no idea, however, what the policy is regarding the dead sea horses and powdered bear bile that are for sale in big glass jars behind the counter at Tong Han Chun Tang, established in 1783 (268 Zhong Shan Zhong Road). Or the Nourish the Ovary Defer Decrepitude pills and Onlly Smart-Brain Liquid at the Shanghai No. 1 Dispensary (various locations).

When I first arrived in Shanghai, I was puzzled by the sight of grown men moseying through the streets in Teddy-bear-patterned pajamas. That was before someone explained the semiotics to me. Now I know: such a man either has finished work for the day or is having a



"I miss hating the city."

day off, and, along with all the other men and women who are wearing pajamas in public, he is telling the world, Yes, I may be working class, but I have leisure time, not to mention enough money for an extra set of silk pajamas (state-regulated Friendship stores; \$55 to \$81).

The clothes at Cha Gang, a tiny boutique in the French Concession, are not for everyone, and I'm glad about that, because it leaves more for me. There's a cushion motif to the cunning creations of the shop's designer, Wang Yiyang—T-shirt dresses with thick padded hems (\$210), coats you could hide out in (\$616), plaid scarves that look like squishy flannel tubes (\$22), slippers with spongy six-inch-long pointed vamps (\$76), and puffy patent-leather purses (\$152). A pair of leather handbags in the shape of oversized mittens—one says “left” and the other says “right,” in Chinese—made me smile, and then I wondered whether perhaps they were actually mittens made to look like handbags. Either way, they are attached to each other by a khaki strap and are meant to be slung over the shoulder like a canteen (70 Yongfu Road; \$145).

A cheongsam (or *qipao*) is a long, body-hugging, embroidered dress with a standup collar, usually made of silk. I would feel like an extra in “The World of Suzie Wong” wearing one. But you may feel differently, or maybe you are a movie extra. For you, the place to go is Maoming Road, particularly the section between Huaihai Road and NanChang Road (\$150 to \$500 for a topnotch cheongsam). For a hip version, perhaps trimmed in fur or adorned with see-through chrysanthemums, try Jinzhuiyue (72 Maoming South Road).

A sleeveless dress of ivory silk, decorated with a line drawing of a bicycle that spans nearly the whole circumference of the hem, is arguably the most glamorous item of clothing in Shanghai. It can be found at Anybody's Blonde, the Shanghai branch of the hugely popular Russian-owned franchise, which is called So French in that country (351 Zizhong Road; \$374).

No matter how you feel about the opera, the exquisite outerwear made by the designer Han Feng will make you

want to be seen there, seated in a prominent box (particularly if you're wearing Han's diaphanous silk-organza coat with beaded-fish detail). Maybe it's not a coincidence, then, that this Shanghai-based designer made the costumes for the Met's 2006 and 2007 productions of “Madame Butterfly” (Jinjiang Hotel, 59 Maoming South Road, by appointment only).

These getups would also make lovely wedding attire. No prospects? Parents shopping for suitable mates for their children gather in the city's parks most weekends to scrutinize and discuss the résumés of candidates, handwritten on bits of paper and torn sheets of cardboard taped to trees, resting on benches, and leaning against the risers of stone steps. The personals (so specific that they include details like “hunts for girl 163 cm”) are written by other yearning mothers and fathers.

Shanghai's Old City is a congestion of narrow lanes and two- and three-story stone gatehouses from the early twentieth century. Many of them shelter three or more persons to a room. On the ground floor is a communal kitchen, shared by the families occupying the building. The sink is outside. Down the block is a neighborhood toilet, but many residents use wood or enamel chamber pots, typically painted with colorful flowers (eighteenth-century Imari chamber pot, Chine-de-Commande.com; \$2,900). There is no lack of enterprise in this district. Note, for instance, the man with a rag who has a car-wash business (\$1.45 for the car's exterior and interior), and the man who repairs shoes and umbrellas (new sole, \$1.40; 22 cents a spoke). On the sidewalk, under the shade, is the rice lady (uncooked grains, from 23 cents per pound). Next to her, a woman working a treadle sewing machine will cuff a pair of pants for 75 cents. The old guy sitting in a storefront, using a magnifying glass to help him read the screen on his cell phone? He's the local barber (45 cents a haircut). A family making crullers, savory bread, and hot soybean milk outside their *shikumen* cooks with homemade charcoal lumps (each breakfast item is about a dime; charcoal not for sale). Stencilled and spray-painted almost everywhere on

the peeling façades of buildings are Chinese characters and Arabic numerals advertising the services of local entrepreneurs, complete with cell-phone numbers. They make for the most fantastic-looking Rolodex ever.

Not far away is Old Street, choked with tourists and not nearly as old as it wants you to think it is. Along this drag, you'll find piles of kitschy book bags, musical lighters, Red Guard caps, and cheesy busts of Mao for sale (a wristwatch with Mao's waving arm as a second hand: \$4). Even more Cultural Revolution-inspired curios, at radical prices, but nicer than the ones on the street, can be bought at Madame Mao's Dowry (207 Fumin Road). Is it just me, or does Mao memorabilia seem akin to Inquisition cutlery or Holocaust stemware?

“Most people my age or younger don't know what happened forty years ago,” Jessica Chen said. “As an experiment, I asked my assistants at the office about what went on at Tiananmen Square. Only one out of five knew.”

In China, it's not always easy to know what's going on, even today. CNN periodically blacks out for twenty seconds or so, and good luck navigating your way around the Great Firewall as you try to get information online about anything having to do with what are referred to as the three “T”s: Taiwan, Tiananmen, and Tibet. Incidentally, the three most popular Google “what is” searches in China in 2007 had to do with “blue chips,” “stock index futures,” and “consumer price index,” whereas worldwide the most popular topics were “love,” “autism,” and “rss.”

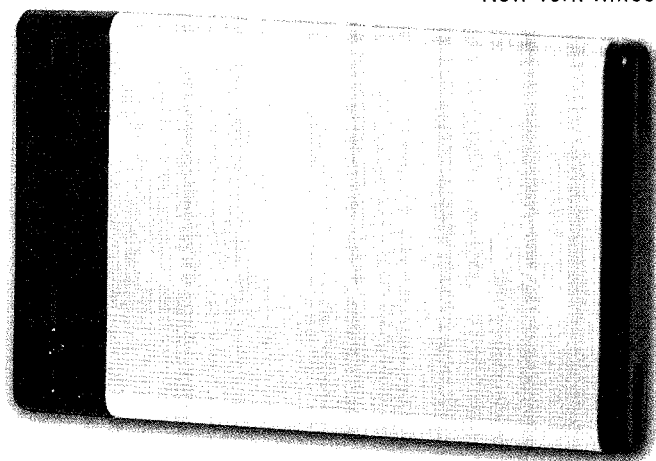
Is there anything you can't get in Shanghai? Here are some things that expatriates told me they crave: anti-perspirant; One-A-Day vitamins; non-soupy yogurt; dark chocolate; opaque tights in interesting colors; bras that aren't gaudy, push-up, or padded; Tampax; stylish shoes with a decent high heel; porn magazines; real rye bread; Mexican food; cereal that costs less than \$10; clothing and shoes in large sizes; avocados; Clairol Born Blonde All-Over hair color. It's also impossible to find souvenir snow globes, but this doesn't seem to matter to anyone but my nephew in Philadelphia. ♦



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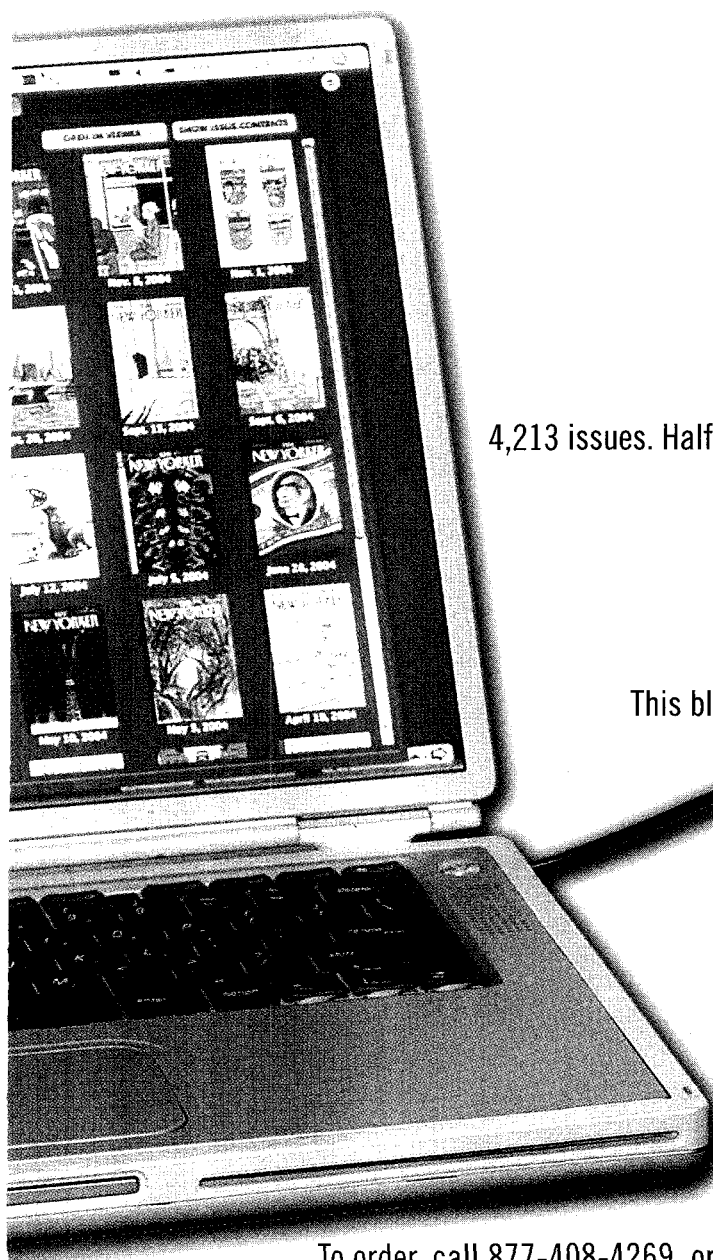
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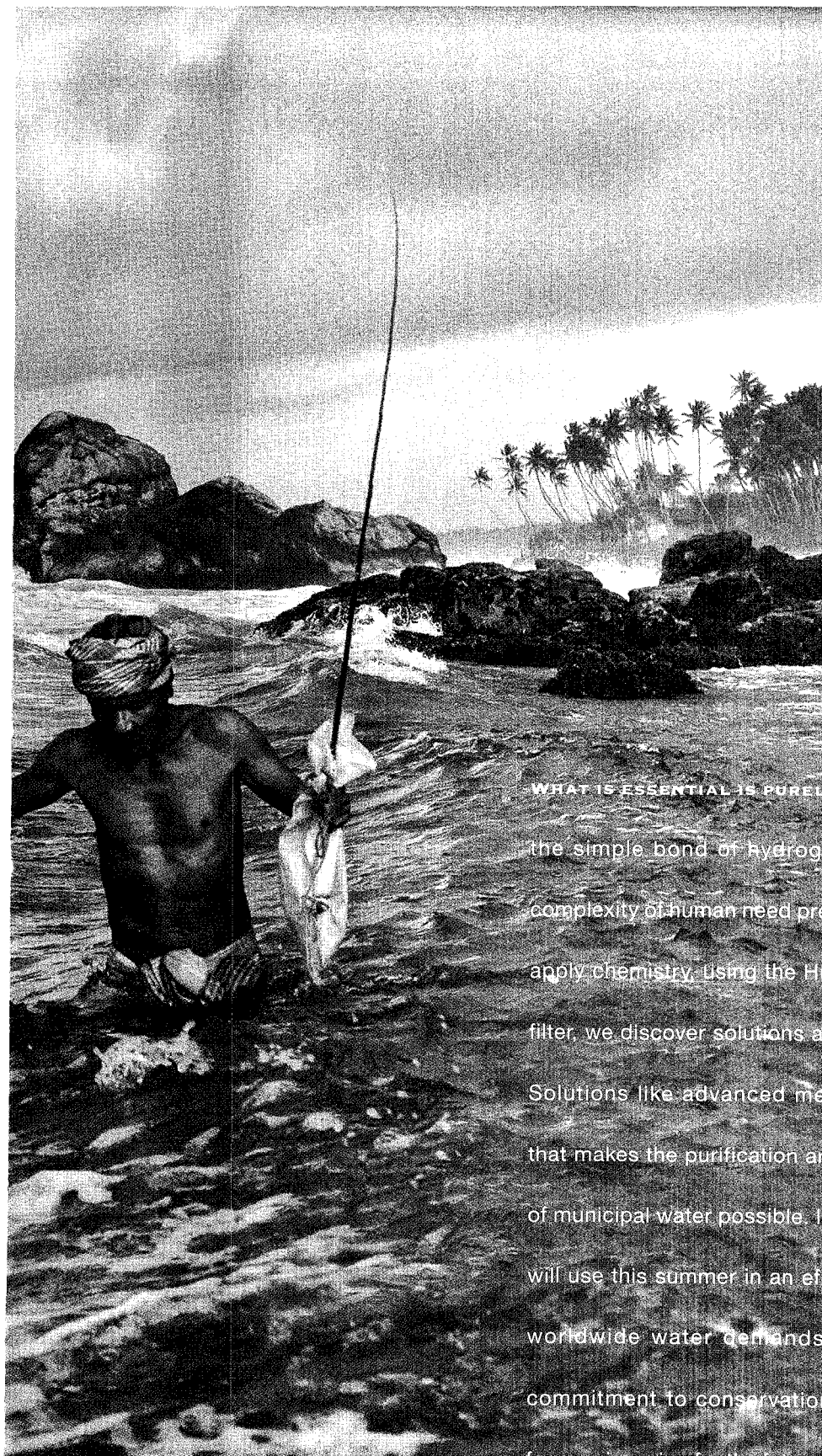


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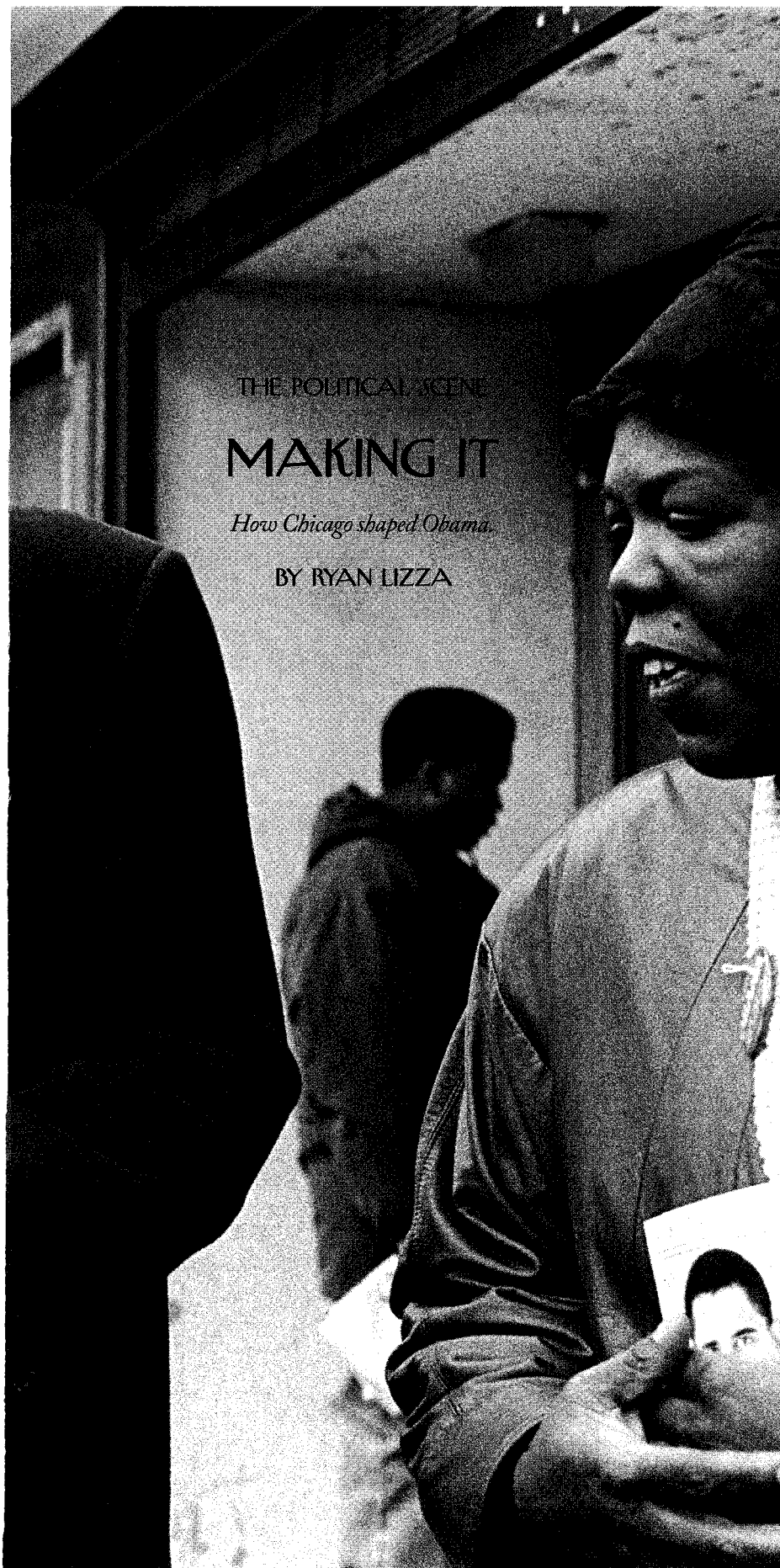




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Barack Obama on the South Side during his first campaign, for the State Senate. An outsider in Chicago's system, he was



THE POLITICAL SCENE
MAKING IT

How Chicago shaped Obama.

BY RYAN LIZZA

nstructing his own political identity and coalition. Photograph by Marc PoKempner.

One day in 1995, Barack Obama went to see his alderman, an influential politician named Toni Preckwinkle, on Chicago's South Side, where politics had been upended by scandal. Mel Reynolds, a local congressman, was facing charges of sexual assault of a sixteen-year-old campaign volunteer. (He eventually resigned his seat.) The looming vacancy set off a fury of ambition and hustle; several politicians, including a state senator named Alice Palmer, an education expert of modest political skills, prepared to enter the congressional race. Palmer represented Hyde Park—Obama's neighborhood, a racially integrated, liberal sanctuary—and, if she ran for Congress, she would need a replacement in Springfield, the state capital. Obama at the time was a thirty-three-year-old lawyer, university lecturer, and aspiring office-seeker, and the Palmer seat was what he had in mind when he visited Alderman Preckwinkle.

"Barack came to me and said, 'If Alice decides she wants to run, I want to run for her State Senate seat,'" Preckwinkle told me. We were in her district office, above a bank on a street of check-cashing shops and vacant lots north of Hyde Park. Preckwinkle soon became an Obama loyalist, and she stuck with him in a State Senate campaign that strained or ruptured many friendships but was ultimately successful. Four years later, in 2000, she backed Obama in a doomed congressional campaign against a local icon, the former Black Panther Bobby Rush. And in 2004 Preckwinkle supported Obama during his improbable, successful run for the United States Senate. So it was startling to learn that Toni Preckwinkle had become disenchanted with Barack Obama.

Preckwinkle is a tall, commanding woman with a clipped gray Afro. She has represented her slice of the South Side for seventeen years and expresses no interest in higher office. On Chicago's City Council, she is often a dissenter against the wishes of Mayor Richard M. Daley. For anyone trying to understand Obama's breathtakingly rapid political ascent, Preckwinkle is an indispensable witness—a close observer, friend, and confidante during a period of Obama's life to which he rarely calls attention.

Although many of Obama's recent supporters have been surprised by signs of political opportunism, Preckwinkle

wasn't. "I think he was very strategic in his choice of friends and mentors," she told me. "I spent ten years of my adult life working to be alderman. I finally got elected. This is a job I love. And I'm perfectly happy with it. I'm not sure that's the way that he approached his public life—that he was going to try for a job and stay there for one period of time. In retrospect, I think he saw the positions he held as stepping stones to other things and therefore approached his public life differently than other people might have."

On issue after issue, Preckwinkle presented Obama as someone who thrived in the world of Chicago politics. She suggested that Obama joined Jeremiah Wright's Trinity United Church of Christ for political reasons. "It's a church that would provide you with lots of social connections and prominent parishioners," she said. "It's a good place for a politician to be a member." Preckwinkle was unsparing on the subject of the Chicago real-estate developer Antoin (Tony) Rezko, a friend of Obama's and one of his top fund-raisers, who was recently convicted of fraud, bribery, and money laundering: "Who you take money from is a reflection of your knowledge at the time and your principles." As we talked, it became increasingly clear that loyalty was the issue that drove Preckwinkle's current view of her onetime protégé. "I don't think you should forget who your friends are," she said.

Others told me that Preckwinkle's grievances against Obama included specific complaints, such as his refusal to endorse a former aide and longtime friend, Will Burns, in a State Senate primary—a contest that Burns won anyway. There was also a more general belief that, after Obama won the 2004 United States Senate primary, he ignored his South Side base. Preckwinkle said, "My view is you have to bring your constituency along with you. Granted, you have to make some tough decisions. Granted, sometimes you have to make decisions that people won't understand or like. But it's your obligation to explain yourself and try to do your supporters the courtesy of treating them with respect." Ivory Mitchell, who for twenty years has been the chairman of the local ward organization in Obama's neighbor-

hood—considered the most important Democratic organization on the South Side—was one of Obama's earliest backers. Today, he says, "All the work we did to help him get where he finally ended up, he didn't seem too appreciative." A year ago, Mitchell became a delegate for Hillary Clinton.

The same month Mitchell endorsed Clinton, the Obama campaign reached out to Preckwinkle, and eventually she signed on as an Obama delegate. I asked her if what she considered slights or betrayals were simply the necessary accommodations and maneuvering of a politician making a lightning transition from Hyde Park legislator to Presidential nominee. "Can you get where he is and maintain your personal integrity?" she said. "Is that the question?" She stared at me and grimaced. "I'm going to pass on that."

"WHO SENT YOU?"

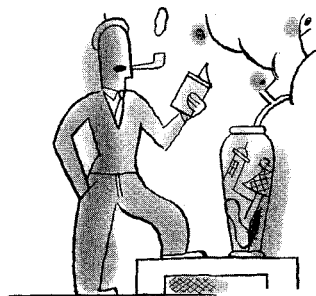
Obama likes to discuss his unusual childhood—his abandonment by his father and his upbringing by a sometimes single mother and his grandparents in Indonesia and Hawaii—and the three years in the nineteen-eighties when he worked as a community organizer in Chicago, periods of his life chronicled at length in his first memoir, "Dreams from My Father." He occasionally refers to his time in the United States Senate, which he wrote about in his second memoir, "The Audacity of Hope." But his life in Chicago from 1991 until his victorious Senate campaign is a lacuna in his autobiography. It is also the period that formed him as a politician. Some Obama supporters professed shock when, recently, he abandoned a pledge to stay within the public campaign-finance system if the presumptive Republican nominee, Senator John McCain, agreed to do the same. Preckwinkle's concern about

Obama—that he is a pure political animal—suddenly became more widespread; commentators abruptly stopped using the words "callow" and "naïve."

Chicago is not Obama's home town, but it's where he chose to forge his identity. Several weeks ago, he moved many of the Democratic National Committee's operations from Washington to Chicago, making the city the unofficial capital of the Democratic Party; his campaign headquarters are in an office building in the Loop, Chicago's downtown business district. But Chicago, with its reputation as a center of vicious and corrupt politics, may also be the place that Obama needs to leave behind.

Simply moving there, as he did after graduating from Harvard Law School, was a bold decision. Chicago, where the late mayor Richard J. Daley and his son, the current mayor, have governed for forty out of the past fifty-three years, is not hospitable to political carpetbaggers. Abner Mikva, who was a congressman from Hyde Park and later the chief judge on the Washington, D.C., Circuit Court, was one of the first Chicago politicians to successfully challenge the Daley machine, and it took him years to overcome people's skepticism about his Wisconsin roots. Mikva, who is now eighty-two, tried to recruit Obama to work for him in Washington as a law clerk. Obama turned him down, replying that he was returning to Chicago to run for office. "I thought, Boy, does he got something to learn," Mikva told me recently. "You just don't come to Chicago and plant your flag."

I met Mikva at the Cliff Dwellers, a private dining club atop a downtown office building. As we looked out over Lake Michigan, he told me a story that has often been repeated by others to capture the essence of politics in the city. "When I first came to Chicago, Adlai Stevenson and Paul Douglas were running for governor and senator," he said. "I had heard about the closed Party, closed machine, but they sounded like such great candidates, so I stopped in to volunteer in the Eighth Ward Regular Democratic headquarters. I said, 'I'm here for Douglas and Stevenson.' The ward boss came in and pulled the cigar out of his mouth and said, 'Who sent you?' And I said, 'No-



COURTING FORGETFULNESS

It's hard to know what sort of rough music
Could send our forgetfulness back into the ground,
From which the gravediggers pulled it years ago.

The first moment of the day we court forgetfulness.
Even when we are fully awake, a century can
Go by in the space of a single heartbeat.

The life we lose through forgetfulness resembles
The earth that sticks to the sides of plowshares
And the eggs the hen has abandoned in the woods.

A thousand gifts were given to us in the womb.
We lost hundreds during the forgetfulness of birth,
And we lost the old heaven on the first day of school.

Forgetfulness resembles the snow that weighs down
The fir boughs; behind our house you'll find
A forest going on for hundreds of miles.

Robert, it's to your credit that you remember
So many lines of Rilke, but the purpose of forgetfulness
Is to remember the last time we left this world.

—Robert Bly

body sent me.' He put the cigar back in his mouth and said, 'We don't want nobody nobody sent.'"

There was another tradition in Chicago politics, the so-called Independents, which grew up in opposition to Richard J. Daley—Boss Daley—whose reign lasted from 1955 to 1976. Anchored in Hyde Park and nurtured by the University of Chicago community, the Independents brought together African-Americans and white liberals in coalitions that became the city's main alternative to the Democratic machine. The Independents arose after the Second World War to challenge the closed patronage system that controlled the city, and became a serious political force in the mid-nineteen-fifties. Their numbers increased with a new wave of black activists energized by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Chicago organizing in 1966, and with white liberals outraged when antiwar protesters were beaten and teargassed by Chicago police during the Democratic National Convention in 1968.

Mayor Daley died in office in 1976, at

the age of seventy-four. He was replaced by a reliable and ineffectual machine candidate, Michael Bilandic, whose appointment marked the beginning of twelve years of chaotic, balkanized politics, sometimes called the "inter-Daley period." David Axelrod, who has been Obama's chief strategist since 2002 and is the foremost political consultant in Chicago, was a witness to all of it, first as a political reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and later as the chief consultant to two mayors: Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor and a hero of the Independents, and the current Mayor Daley, whose last name still carries negative connotations in the precincts of Hyde Park. Axelrod, who is fifty-three, is by nature subdued. He wears a mustache that curls down the sides of his upper lip in a permanent expression of melancholy. We met in a Houlihan's, off the lobby of the building that houses the Obama campaign headquarters.

Axelrod recalled the election, in 1979, of Jane Byrne, Chicago's first female mayor, which he wrote about for the *Tribune*. Byrne's campaign, assisted by snow-

storms that shut down the city and showcased Bilandic's incompetence, was the first successful insurgency in modern Chicago history. "It was a great reform campaign," Axelrod said. "I then chronicled, for the next four years, her systematic abrogation of every commitment she had made to reform. She became sort of a parody of a machine mayor." In office, Byrne aligned herself with City Council officials who were hostile to the city's black leadership, pandered to the voters of the most racist wards of the city, and purged African-Americans from key positions. On the South Side, there was a backlash; Washington, who had run a spirited campaign for mayor in 1977, was elected to Congress in 1980. In 1983, he was essentially drafted by a Hyde Park-based coalition desperate to unseat the disappointing Byrne. Washington won a three-way primary, with thirty-six per cent of the vote, and went on in the general election to defeat a white Republican who ran, briefly, on the implicitly racist slogan "Before it's too late." Washington's first term was dominated by warfare with a City Council controlled by white aldermen determined to stymie every proposal. But in 1986 he took control of the council and the following year was reelected. Seven months after his victory, he collapsed at his desk, dead of a heart attack at the age of sixty-five. Axelrod saw much of this history from the inside, as Washington's strategist; Obama saw it from the perspective of an organizer who occasionally had brushes with the powerful at political events or meetings at City Hall. "He saw the jagged edges of Chicago politics and urban politics pretty close up," Axelrod said.

Obama spent three years in the city, from 1985, after he graduated from Columbia University, to the end of the Washington era. As a community organizer, he tried to turn a partnership of churches into a political force on the South Side. But the work accomplished very little.

"When I started organizing, I understood the idea of social change in a very abstract way," Obama told me last year. "It was to some extent informed by my years in Indonesia, seeing extreme poverty and disparities of wealth and understanding sort of in a dim way that life wasn't fair and government had something to do with it. I understood the role that issues

like race played and took inspiration from the civil-rights movement and what the student sit-ins had accomplished and the freedom rides.

"But I didn't come out of a political family, didn't have a history of activism in my family. So I understood these things in the abstract. When I went to Chicago, it was the first time that I had the opportunity to test out my ideas. And for the most part I would say I wasn't wildly successful. The victories that we achieved were extraordinarily modest: you know, getting a job-training site set up or getting an after-school program for young people put in place."

CONSTRUCTING A NETWORK

In 1988, Obama left for Harvard Law School, returning to Chicago twice for summer stints at elite law firms, including, after his first year, Sidley Austin. (Sidley Austin is where he met Michelle Robinson, whom he married in 1992.) He returned to Chicago permanently when he graduated, in 1991. In a short period, he built a notable résumé and a network of connections. During the 1992 Presidential campaign, he ran a voter-registration drive that placed him at the center of the city's politics. That year, Il-

linois elected the first African-American woman to the U.S. Senate, Carol Moseley Braun, and Bill Clinton became the first Democratic Presidential candidate to carry Illinois since Lyndon Johnson, in 1964. Meanwhile, Obama practiced civil-rights law at a firm admired in the city's progressive circles, and became a popular lecturer in the law school at the University of Chicago. He was on the board of two liberal foundations that spread grant money around Chicago, and he settled in Hyde Park.

It was a neighborhood in transition when Obama arrived. The *Hyde Park Herald* serves as a sort of time capsule. It reported that crime was rising; a series of violent robberies was another reminder that Hyde Park existed as a middle-class island in a sea of high-crime urban poverty. New data showed that white enrollment was steeply declining at one local school. During the Martin Luther King, Jr., celebrations, the newspaper noted in passing that Jeremiah Wright was scheduled to give a speech at the University of Chicago. Considerable coverage was given to two institutions: the local food co-op, where Obama shopped every Saturday, and the Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization, or I.V.I.-I.P.O., one of the

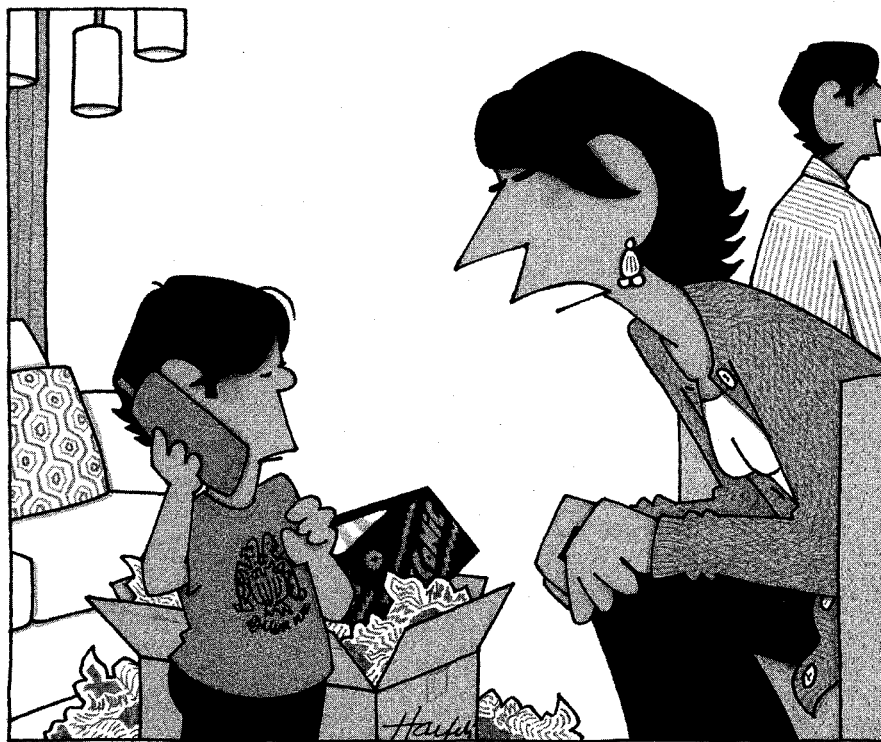
neighborhood's most influential political groups. There was a new political force in Hyde Park as well. Real-estate developers were swooping in to rehabilitate low-income housing. On more than one occasion, the *Hyde Park Herald* reported on the rise in campaign donations from these developers to South Side politicians; in 1995, it ran a front-page article about Tony Rezko, who was then a very active new donor on the scene.

While it's true that nobody sent Obama in the sense that Abner Mikva meant it, one of Obama's underappreciated assets, as he looked for a political race in the early nineties, was the web of connections that he had established. "He understands how you network," Mikva said. "I remember our first few meetings. He would say, 'Do you know So-and-So?' And I'd say yes. 'How well do you know him? I'd really like to meet him.' I would set up some lunches."

The 1992 voter-registration drive, Project Vote, introduced him to much of the city's black leadership. "If you want to look at the means of ascent, if you will, look at Project Vote," Will Burns, the former Obama aide, said. In Chicago progressive circles, Burns, who is thirty-four, is described as an up-and-coming African-American legislator in the Obama tradition. Obama's refusal to endorse Burns in his primary earlier this year infuriated and mystified a number of Chicago Democrats, though Burns himself displays no bitterness and is now an adviser to the Obama campaign.

At Project Vote, Burns said, Obama "was making connections at the grassroots level and was working with elected officials. That's when he first got a scan of the broader black political infrastructure." It was also the beginning of a dynamic that stood out in Obama's early career: his uneasy relationship with an older generation of black Chicago politicians. Project Vote "is where a lot of the divisional rivalries popped up," Burns said.

In this early foray into politics, Obama revealed the toughness and brashness that this year's long primary season brought into view. As Burns, who has a mischievous sense of humor and a gift for mimicry, recalled, "Black activists, community folks, felt that he didn't respect their role"—Burns imitated a self-righteous activist—"in the struggle and



"Tell your grandfather how much you like his present and ask him if he still has the receipt."

the movement. He didn't engage in obedience to them. He wanted to get the job done. And Barack's cheap, too. If you can't do it and do it in a cost-effective manner, you're not going to work with him." Ivory Mitchell, the ward chairman in Obama's neighborhood, says of Obama that "he was typical of what most aspiring politicians are: self-centered—that 'I can do anything and I'm willing to do it overnight.'"

During Project Vote, Obama also began to understand the larger world of Chicago's liberal fund-raisers. "He met people not just in the African-American community but in the progressive white community," David Axelrod said. "The folks who funded Project Vote were some of the key progressive leaders." Obama met Axelrod through one of Project Vote's supporters, Bettylu Saltzman, whose father, Philip M. Klutznick, was a Chicago shopping-mall tycoon, a part owner of the Bulls, and a former Commerce Secretary in the Carter Administration. Saltzman, a soft-spoken activist who worked for Senators Adlai E. Stevenson III and Paul Simon, took an immediate interest in Obama. "I honestly don't remember what it was about him, but I was absolutely blown away," Saltzman says. "I said to several people that this guy, who is now thirty years old, is someday going to be President. He will be our first black President."

Obama's legal career helped bring him into Chicago's liberal reform community. In 1993, after he finished his work with Project Vote and was seeking to join a law firm, instead of returning to Sidley Austin he took a job at Davis, Miner, Barnhill & Galland, a boutique civil-rights firm led by Harold Washington's former counsel, Judson Miner. Miner had perfect anti-Daley credentials, routinely filing lawsuits against the city, and was a founding member of the Chicago Council of Lawyers, which was to Chicago's legal elite what the Independents were to the Democratic machine.

Working at Davis, Miner enhanced Obama's profile. "When you go work for Judd Miner's law firm, that's another kind of political statement," Don Rose, a longtime Chicago political consultant, who ran Jane Byrne's campaign, told me. Will Burns said, "I think it might have been helpful with a certain group of people that Barack may have wanted to have at his

back at the outset. So you get the support of the liberals and the progressives and the reformers, and then that gives you a base to then expand to pick up other folks. And then folks would be willing to give money to the bright, shiny new candidate." Joining Miner's firm, like living in Hyde Park, was a way of choosing sides in the city's long-running political battle between the machine and the Independents. Toni Preckwinkle explained Miner's legal work this way: "They've shown a remarkable willingness to take on the Democratic organization and the Democratic establishment in this city and win. Which is why I like them and a lot of people hate them."

If Project Vote and Miner's firm introduced Obama to the city's lakefront liberals and South Side politicians, it was his wife who helped connect him to Chicago's black elite. One of Michelle's best friends was Jesse Jackson's daughter Santita, who became the godmother of the Obamas' first child. Michelle had worked as an aide to the younger Daley—hired by Valerie Jarrett, who is now one of Obama's closest advisers. (Jarrett, an African-American, was born in Iran, where her father, a doctor, helped run a hospital; she and Obama formed a bond over their unusual biographies.) It was also through Michelle that Obama met Marty Nesbitt, a successful young black entrepreneur who happened to play basketball with Michelle's brother, Craig. (Nesbitt's wife, Anita Blanchard, an obstetrician, delivered the Obamas' two daughters.) Nesbitt became Obama's closest friend and a bridge to the city's African-American business class.

Obama seems to have been meticulous about constructing a political identity for himself. He visited churches on the South Side, considered the politics and reputations of each one, and received advice from older pastors. Before deciding on Trinity United Church of Christ, he asked the Reverend Wright about critics who complained that the church was too "upwardly mobile," a place for buppies. Though he admired Judson Miner, he was similarly cautious about joining his law firm. Miner once told me that it took "a series of lunches" and hours of discussion before Obama made his decision. At the time, Obama was working on "Dreams from My Father."

Many have said that part of the appeal of "Dreams" is its honesty, pointing out that it was written at a time when Obama had no idea that he would run for office. In fact, Obama had been talking about a political career for years, musing about becoming mayor or governor. According to a recent biography of Obama by the *Chicago Tribune* reporter David Mendell, he even told his future brother-in-law, Craig Robinson, that he might run for President one day. (Robinson teased him, saying, "Yeah, yeah, okay, come over and meet my Aunt Gracie—and don't tell anybody that!") Obama was writing "Dreams" at the moment that he was preparing for a life in politics, and he launched his book and his first political campaign simultaneously, in the summer of 1995, when he saw his first chance of winning.

Many people who knew Obama then remember him for his cockiness. He had good reason to be self-assured. A number of his accomplishments had been accompanied by adoring press coverage. When he was named president of the *Harvard Law Review*, in 1990, he was profiled by, among others, the *Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Vanity Fair*, and the Associated Press. Even then, the essential elements of Obama-mania were present: the fascination with his early life, the adulatory quotes from friends who thought that he would be President one day, and Obama's frank, though sometimes ostentatious, capacity for self-reflection. ("To some extent, I'm a symbolic stand-in for a lot of the changes that have been made," he told the *Boston Globe* in 1990.)

His work for Project Vote was similarly applauded. In 1993, *Crain's Chicago Business* reported that Obama had "galvanized Chicago's political community, as no seasoned politico had before," and an alderman told *Crain's*, "Under Barack's leadership, we had the most successful, cost-effective and orderly voter registration drive I've ever been involved with." When "Dreams from My Father" was published, the reviews were overwhelmingly positive; *Booklist* included the memoir in a "guide to some of the best books of 1995."

Obama knew that Hyde Park, despite its reputation as the center of anti-machine progressives, was not exempt

from other Chicago political traditions. During the first half of 1995, when he was preparing for his campaign for the State Senate, a big story in the neighborhood was a race for alderman marked by accusations of dirty tricks (endorsement flyers from a phony group of gay African-Americans were distributed the day before the election, apparently in an effort to stoke homophobia) and anti-Semitism (the campaign of one of the candidates was accused of being run by "Jewish overseers").

THE SOUTH SIDE CHOOSES

Obama's campaign began without much excitement. He had ties to so many of the city's elite factions that the local press described him as "a well-connected attorney." In August, the *Chicago Sun-Times* noted that Valerie Jarrett was hosting "a private autograph party" for Obama. His memoir was turning him into a figure of some acclaim. The same month, the *Hyde Park Herald*, which later called the book "a local indie hit," ran a flattering profile that highlighted a theme from "Dreams": how Chicago helped Obama end a long journey of self-discovery, a narrative that helped defuse any notion that Obama was a carpetbagger. "I came home in Chicago," he told the newspaper. "I began to see my identity and my individual struggles were one with the struggles that folks face in Chicago."

A month later, on September 19th, Obama invited some two hundred supporters to a lakefront Ramada Inn to announce his candidacy for the State Senate, and some of what he said sounded very much like the Obama of recent months. "Politicians are not held to highest esteem these days," he told the crowd. "They fall somewhere lower than lawyers. . . . I want to inspire a renewal of morality in politics. I will work as hard as I can, as long as I can, on your behalf." Alice Palmer introduced Obama, and an account in the *Hyde Park Herald* quoted more from her speech than from his; it was, after all, chiefly her endorsement that certified him as a plausible candidate. "In this room, Harold Washington announced for mayor," Palmer said. "Barack Obama carries on the tradition of independence in this district. . . . His candidacy is a passing of the torch."

Also in attendance that day were Toni Preckwinkle and Will Burns, who was then a recent University of Chicago graduate. (He went on to get a master's in social sciences; Obama helped persuade him to leave the university before he got a Ph.D., telling him, "You shouldn't be too academic.") Obama's talk of a "renewal of morality in politics," which previewed themes that emerged in this year's campaign, also tapped into a desire for generational change—similarly consistent with his current rhetoric. He was able to capture the imagination of some young African-Americans frustrated by their local leadership. Burns said, "You have to understand, it's 1995. It's the year after the Republicans have taken over control of Congress, and in Illinois all three branches of government were also controlled by the Republicans. So it was a really dark point. I was looking to be engaged in something that would mean something, that would actually get something done and that was beyond symbols. Around the same time that I started up with Barack, volunteering on his campaign, I had gone to some of the old community groups and nationalist organizations. I respected what they had done, but I didn't feel like that was really where I wanted to be."

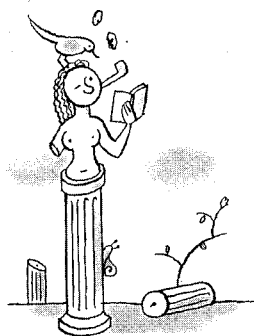
However, the campaign was no insurgency. Obama abided by the local way of doing things. He had lined up support from Preckwinkle, his alderman, and Ivory Mitchell, the local ward chairman, and Palmer's endorsement brought with it two organizational assets: local operators and local activists. The operators helped Obama get on the ballot and handled the mechanics of his election. Two key operators were Alan Dobry and his wife, Lois Friedberg-Dobry, then in their late sixties and leaders of the Independent movement. "When you go to a political meeting, and you see a couple of guys or girls at

the back of the room, and they aren't glad-handing or anything, those are the operators," Alan Dobry told me recently. There was a machinelike quality to the way the campaign unfolded. Palmer's endorsement was the only signal that the Dobrys needed to start the slow, detailed organizing necessary to win a State Senate seat for Obama, whom they had never met, though they lived in his neighborhood.

Palmer's imprimatur was also helpful with a small group of Hyde Park activists, some of whom she asked to hold fund-raising coffees for Obama. At her suggestion, Sam and Martha Ackerman, who were leaders of Independent Voters of Illinois, hosted a coffee at their home. Unlike the Dobrys, they insisted on a meeting with Obama before backing him, and their support was important enough for him to spend an hour with them in their dining room, submitting to an interview. Their reaction to him was a common one. "I don't think he said he wanted to run for President, but he indicated that he was into public service for the long haul," Martha Ackerman told me. "I remember very clearly I said to Sam, 'If this guy is for real, he could be the first African-American President of the United States.'"

Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn, another activist Hyde Park couple, also held an event for Obama. Forty years ago, Ayers and Dohrn were leaders of the Weathermen, the militant antiwar group that bombed the Pentagon and the United States Capitol. By the time Obama met Ayers, the former radical and onetime fugitive had been accepted into polite Chicago society and had been reborn as an education expert, eventually working as an informal adviser to Mayor Daley. (Those ties remain intact in the jumbled culture of Chicago politics. When Obama's association with Ayers first became a campaign issue, Daley, whose father, in 1968, sent his police force into the streets to combat Ayers's fellow-radicals, issued a statement praising Ayers as "a valued member of the Chicago community.")

Obama seemed sure enough that he would win the State Senate primary, to be held in March, 1996—in Chicago, winning the primary is tantamount to winning the seat—to take time, late that summer, for a brief book tour, which

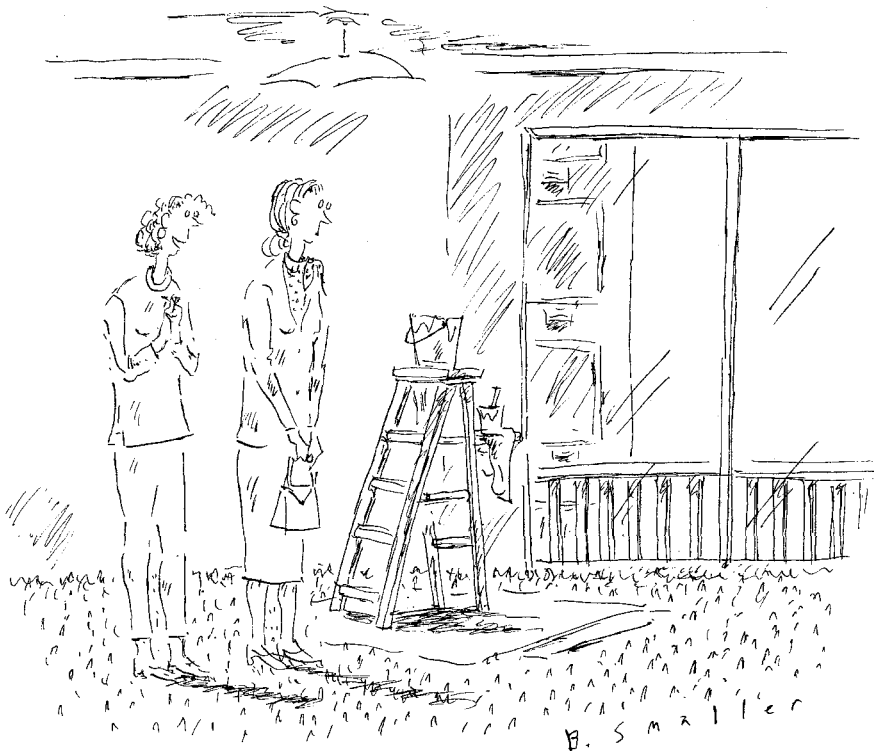


started in Hyde Park and carried him as far as California. In October, he was one of the thousands of African-Americans from Chicago who travelled to Washington for the Million Man March. (Obama criticized the march, telling a local alternative newspaper that it was a waste of energy.) When he returned home, he had more immediate problems. In December, 1995, the South Side coalition that he had cobbled together began to fall apart. Palmer's congressional campaign was eclipsed by her Democratic-primary opponents—Jesse Jackson, Jr., who had star power, and Emil Jones, a longtime leader in the State Senate. Several weeks before the primary, a group of her supporters—mostly older black activists, not unlike those Obama had tangled with when he was running Project Vote—realized that Palmer was destined for defeat and summoned him to a meeting. The *Chicago Defender* reported that Obama was asked “to step aside like other African Americans have done in other races for the sake of unity and to release Palmer from her commitment”—so that she could reclaim her State Senate seat. Obama left the meeting noncommittal.

Palmer was soundly defeated by Jackson—she got only ten per cent of the vote—and there were more insistent demands that Obama withdraw. He refused, which angered Palmer and her husband, Buzz. Buzz Palmer was a founder of the Afro-American Patrolman's League, a reform group within the Chicago police department, and the couple had many ties to the city's black leadership. Palmer, announcing that she had been drafted back into the State Senate race, went from being Obama's most important supporter to his chief challenger; the woman who had launched his political career now threatened to end it. “That's Chicago politics,” Obama told a reporter—with a sigh, the account said.

The South Side political community was forced to choose. The Ackermans went with Palmer, the Dobrys with Obama. Emil Jones announced his support for Palmer. Alderman Preckwinkle stayed with Obama. “I had given him my word I would support him,” she told me. “Alice didn't forgive me, and she's never going to forgive me.”

“These old nationalist guys start beating a drum—probably not the right



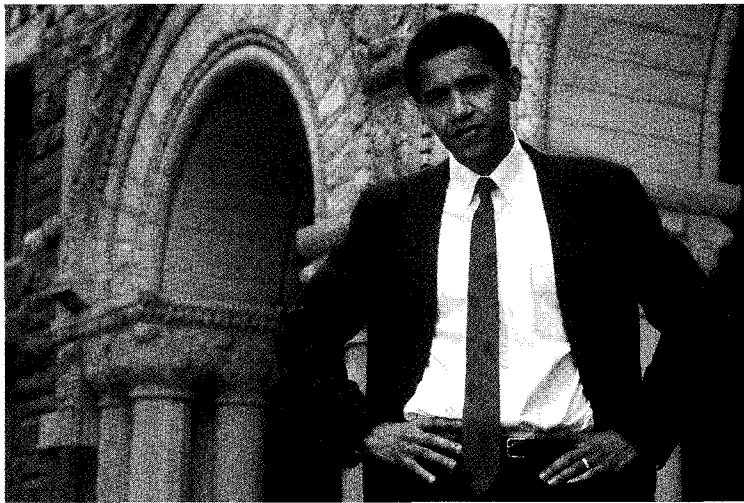
“We had an expert restore all the original shag carpeting.”

metaphor—about how Barack should let this elder back in and how seniority's important,” Burns said. “And they're writing essays in the *Defender* and *N'Digo*”—another local paper covering Chicago's black community. A comment in the *Defender* by Robert Starks, a professor of political science at Chicago's Northeastern Illinois University and one of Palmer's chief supporters, was typical: “If she doesn't run, that seat will go to a Daley supporter. We have asked her to reconsider not running because we don't think Obama can win. He hasn't been in town long enough. . . . Nobody knows who he is. . . . We need someone with experience.”

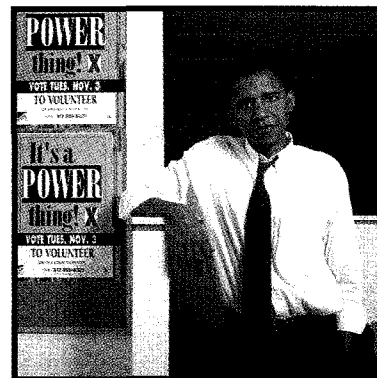
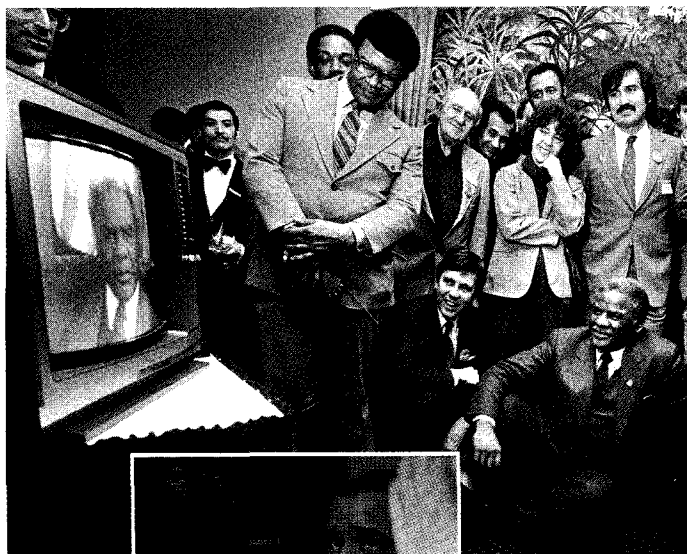
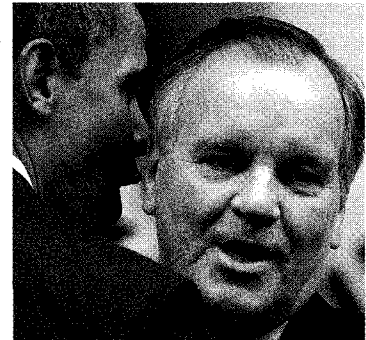
But, almost as fast as the threat to his campaign appeared, Obama stamped it out. The Dobrys were surprised that Palmer had so quickly gathered the signatures necessary to qualify for the ballot. They went to the Chicago board of elections and reviewed her petitions; as they suspected, they were filled with irregularities. One skill that the Independents had mastered in the years of fighting the first Mayor Daley was the machine's tactic of challenging ballot petitions, and the Dobrys were experts at

this Chicago ritual. Publicly, Obama was conciliatory about the awkward political situation, telling the *Hyde Park Herald* that he understood that some people were upset about the “conflict between old loyalties and new enthusiasms.” Privately, however, he unleashed his operators. With the help of the Dobrys, he was able to remove not just Palmer's name from the ballot but the name of every other opponent as well. “He ran unopposed, which is a good way to win,” Mikva said, laughing at the recollection. And Palmer said last week, “Anyone who enters Chicago politics and can't take the rough and tumble shouldn't be there. Losing the seat was just that—not the end of the world.”

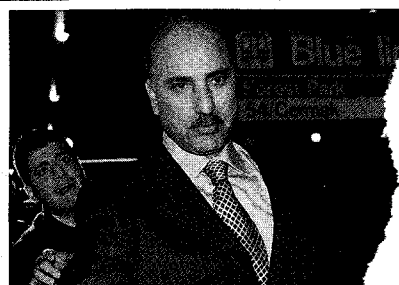
Instead of arriving in Springfield as the consensus candidate of his district, Obama was regarded as a troublemaker. “He had created some enemies,” Emil Jones, who in 2003 became president of the Illinois Senate, said. Burns described the fallout of the Obama-Palmer race this way: “It established a reputation that ‘you're not going to punk me, you're not going to roll me over, you're not going to jam me.’ I think it established him as a



Clockwise from left: Obama at Harvard; with Mayor Richard M. Daley; Bobby Rush defeats Obama for Congress; Alderman Toni Preckwinkle; with State Senator Emil Jones.



Clockwise from far left: Marilyn Katz and Harold Washington (seated); at Project Vote; with Bettylu Saltzman; Tony Rezko; Michelle Obama and Marty Nesbitt.



threat. You have his independence with Project Vote, you have his refusal to knuckle under during the Alice Palmer thing, and so now you have a series of data points that have some established leaders in the black community feeling disrespected. And so the stage is now set for the comeuppance during the congressional race. That was their payback.”

ILLINOIS TURNS BLUE

In the political culture of 1996, two years after the ascendancy of the Gingrich Republicans, many Democrats ran as chastened and cautious politicians; among them was Bill Clinton, who turned his reelection-campaign strategy over to Dick Morris (who had worked for Jesse Helms and Trent Lott, as well as Democrats) and the militantly centrist pollster Mark Penn (the Morris protégé who helped run Hillary Clinton’s primary campaign). By then, Bill Clinton had abandoned his effort for universal health care and was about to sign into law a welfare-reform bill that Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan had denounced, saying, “For the first time since it was enacted in 1935, we are about to repeal a core provision of the Social Security Act.” The bill was one of the most important factors in securing Clinton’s reelection.

Had Obama not been running for office in one of the most liberal districts in Illinois, he would have drawn notice as a fairly bold Democrat. To judge by his public comments, he seemed both appalled and impressed by President Clinton’s political skill. In an interview with the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, published a few days after Clinton said that he would sign the welfare-reform bill, Obama talked about the Presidential campaign, saying that Bob Dole “seems to me to be a classic example of somebody who had no reason to run. You’re seventy-three years old, you’re already the third-most-powerful man in the country. So why? . . . And Bill Clinton? Well, his campaign’s fascinating to a student of politics. It’s disturbing to someone who cares about certain issues. But politically it seems to be working.”

Soon, Obama began writing a regular column—“Springfield Report”—for the *Hyde Park Herald*. In the first one, on February 19, 1997, he wrote, “Last year,

President Clinton signed a bill that, for the first time in 60 years, eliminates the federal guarantee of support for poor families and their children.” The column was earnest and wonky. It betrayed no hint of liberal piety about the new law, but emphasized that there weren’t enough entry-level jobs in Chicago to absorb all the welfare recipients who would soon be leaving the system.

In effect, while President Clinton and the national Democratic Party were drifting to the right, State Senator Obama pushed in the opposite direction. The new welfare law was one of the first issues that Obama faced as a legislator. “I am not a defender of the status quo with respect to welfare,” he said, choosing his words with care during debate on the Illinois Senate floor. “Having said that, I probably would not have supported the federal legislation, because I think it had some problems. But I’m a strong believer in making lemonade out of lemons.” Perhaps the law’s most punitive aspect was that it cut off aid to poor legal immigrants, a provision that Clinton, in his 2004 memoir, called “particularly harsh” and “unjustifiable.” The law that Obama helped pass in Illinois restored benefits to this group. (In a continuing effort to produce lemonade, Obama’s first ad of the 2008 general-election campaign says that he “passed laws moving people from welfare to work.”) Obama resisted the national rightward trend of the mid-nineties in other small ways. He sponsored an amendment to the state constitution that would have made health care a universal right in Illinois and helped pass an ethics bill that reformed Illinois’s antiquated campaign-finance system.

In hindsight, little of his legislative record seems controversial. Some of the bills that he sponsored, statements that he made, and votes that he cast could be caricatured in a Presidential campaign. (In one 1997 column, he said, “I supported Governor Edgar’s plan to raise the income tax,” and in a 1999 debate, speaking of himself and his two opponents, he noted that “we’re all on the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.”) But 2008 is not 1988, and Republican attacks on tax hikes and calling an opponent a liberal lack much of their formerly compelling electoral power.

Obama has benefitted from impeccable timing. As the national Party entered

a period of ideological timidity, he was at the vanguard of a Democratic revival in Illinois that had begun in 1992, when Clinton and Braun won the state, and grew stronger when, four years later, Democrats took over the Illinois House of Representatives. It continued through 2002, when Democrats won the State Senate and the governor’s office. By 2004, when Obama ran for the United States Senate, Illinois was a solidly blue state.

Not all of this was due to Democratic ingenuity; during this period the state Republican Party collapsed under the weight of corruption scandals. That is something of an Illinois tradition: four of the last nine governors have been indicted on charges of corruption, and three were convicted. As Saul Bellow once remarked, “Politics are politics, crime is crime, but in Chicago they occasionally overlap. The line between virtue and vice meanders madly—effective government on one side, connections on the other.”

There were further changes under way in Chicago. Obama had won his first campaign by using old-fashioned Chicago machine tactics at a time when the notion of machine politics was increasingly anachronistic. As the political consultant Don Rose and his colleague James Andrews explain in a chapter for a book about the current Mayor Daley’s first victory, the machine literally provided voters with access to food, health care, and a job. In most American cities, that model vanished after the Second World War; by then, the blue-collar base was leaving for the suburbs and reform movements were challenging machine politics. In Chicago, Rose and Andrews say, the elder Daley updated and preserved the system by creating a modern machine that combined “big labor and big capital, blue and white collars, and minorities”—a hybrid model that died with him.

Gradually, Chicago caught up with the rest of the country and media-driven politics eclipsed machine-driven politics. “It became increasingly difficult to get into homes and apartments to talk about candidates,” Rose said. “High-rises were tough if not impossible to crack, and other parts of the city had become too dangerous to walk around in for hours at a time. And people didn’t want to answer their doors. Thus the in-

creasing dependence on TV, radio, direct mail, phone-banking, robocalls, et cetera—all things that cost a hell of a lot more money than patronage workers, who were themselves in decline, anyway, because of anti-patronage court rulings.” Instead of a large army of ward heelers dragging people to the polls, candidates needed a small army of donors to pay for commercials. Money replaced bodies as the currency of Chicago politics. This new system became known as “pinstripe patronage,” because the key to winning was not rewarding voters with jobs but rewarding donors with government contracts.

E. J. Dionne, Jr., of the *Washington Post*, wrote about this transition in a 1999 column after Daley was reelected. Dionne wrote about a young Barack Obama, who artfully explained how the new pinstripe patronage worked: a politician rewards the law firms, developers, and brokerage houses with contracts, and in return they pay for the new ad campaigns necessary for reelection. “They do well, and you get a \$5 million to \$10 million war chest,” Obama told Dionne. It was a classic Obamaism: superficially critical of some unseemly aspect of the political process without necessarily forswearing the practice itself. Obama was learning that one of the greatest skills a politician can possess is candor about the dirty work it takes to get and stay elected.

At the time, Obama was growing closer to Tony Rezko, who eventually turned pinstripe patronage into an extremely lucrative way of life. Rezko’s rise in Illinois was intertwined with Obama’s. Like Abner Mikva and Judson Miner, he had tried to recruit Obama to work for him. Chicago had been at the forefront of an urban policy to lure developers into low-income neighborhoods with tax credits, and Rezko was an early beneficiary of the program. Miner’s law firm was eager to do the legal work on the tax-credit deals, which seemed consistent with the firm’s over-all civil-rights mission. A residual benefit was that the new developers became major donors to aldermen, state senators, and other South Side politicians who represented the poor neighborhoods in which Rezko and others operated. “Our relationship deepened when I started my first political campaign for the State Senate,” Obama said earlier

this year, in an interview with Chicago reporters.

Rezko was one of the people Obama consulted when he considered running to replace Palmer, and Rezko eventually raised about ten per cent of Obama’s funds for that first campaign. As a state senator, Obama became an advocate of the tax-credit program. “That’s an example of a smart policy,” he told the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin* in 1997. “The developers were thinking in market terms and operating under the rules of the marketplace; but at the same time, we had government supporting and subsidizing those efforts.” Obama and Rezko’s friendship grew stronger. They dined together regularly and even, on at least one occasion, retreated to Rezko’s vacation home, in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

“WHATEVER YOUR NAME IS”

Obama’s subtle understanding of the way the city’s politics had changed—with fund-raising replacing organization as the key to victory—surely encouraged him in his next campaign. Almost as soon as he got to Springfield, he was planning another move. He was bored there—once, he appeared to doze off during a caucus meeting—and frustrated by the Republicans’ total control over the legislature. He seemed to believe, according to colleagues at the time, that he was destined for better things than being trapped in one of America’s more notoriously corrupt state capitals. Obama spent little time socializing with “the guys basically from Chicago,” the veteran senator Emil Jones said. “He hung around a lot of the downstaters. They became good friends.”

Obama’s relations with some of his black colleagues from Chicago were dreadful from the beginning. On March 13, 1997, Obama introduced one of his first pieces of legislation, a modest bill to make a directory of community-college graduates available to local employers. There was a response from Rickey Hendon, a state senator from the West Side of Chicago who had been close to Alice Palmer. After Obama explained his bill, Hendon, who has dabbled in film and television work, earning him the nickname Hollywood,

rose to ask a question, and the following exchange occurred:

HENDON: Senator, could you correctly pronounce your name for me? I’m having a little trouble with it.

OBAMA: Obama.

HENDON: Is that Irish?

OBAMA: It will be when I run countywide.

HENDON: That was a good joke, but this bill’s still going to die. This directory, would that have those 1-800 sex line numbers in this directory?

OBAMA: I apologize. I wasn’t paying Senator Hendon any attention.

HENDON: Well, clearly, as poorly as this legislation is drafted, you didn’t pay it much attention either. My question was: Are the 1-800 sex line numbers going to be in this directory?

OBAMA: Not—not—basically this idea comes out of the South Side community colleges. I don’t know what you’re doing on the West Side community colleges. But we probably won’t be including that in our directory for the students.

HENDON: ... Let me just say this, and to the bill: I seem to remember a very lovely Senator by the name of Palmer—much easier to pronounce than Obama—and she always had cookies and nice things to say, and you don’t have anything to give us around your desk. How do you expect to get votes? And—and you don’t even wear nice perfume like Senator Palmer did. ... I’m missing Senator Palmer because of these weak replacements with these tired bills that makes absolutely no sense. I ... I definitely urge a No vote. Whatever your name is.

Although the exchange was part of a longstanding tradition of hazing new legislators, the tensions between Hendon and Obama were real. On another occasion, Obama voted—a parliamentary error, Obama says—to block funding for a child-welfare facility in Hendon’s district. Hendon rose and criticized Obama for the vote. The two men became embroiled in a yelling match on the Senate floor that looked as if it might become physical; they were separated by Courtney Nottage, then the chief of staff for Emil Jones. Nottage led Obama off the floor to a room that legislators used to make telephone calls. “It looked like two men that were having a serious disagreement and they had walked up to one another really close,” Nottage told me. “I didn’t think anything good could come of that.”

Hendon told me, “*He’s* the one that got mad, because he said I embarrassed him on the Senate floor. That’s when he came over to *my* desk.” Before Nottage broke them up, Obama, who had learned to box from his Indonesian stepfather, supposedly told Hendon, “I’m going to kick your ass!” Hendon said, “He said

something like that.” He added that more details will appear in a book that he’s written, entitled “Black Enough, White Enough: The Obama Dilemma.”

Obama’s friends were not surprised when, in 1999, he decided to challenge Bobby Rush, who has represented the South Side in Congress since 1992. Rush had run against Daley in the 1999 mayoral primary, and Obama interpreted Rush’s defeat in that citywide race as a harbinger of his declining popularity in his congressional district.

The race against Rush was the turning point in Obama’s political career. It started with a brilliant bit of oratory that alluded to Abner Mikva’s story about the insularity of Chicago politics and sought to turn Obama’s disadvantages into strengths. “Nobody sent me,” Obama said at his campaign kickoff, on September 26, 1999. “I’m not part of some long-standing political organization. I have no fancy sponsors. I’m not even from Chicago. My name is Obama. Despite that fact, somebody sent me. . . . The men on the corner in Woodlawn drowning their sorrows in alcohol . . . the women working two jobs. . . . They’re all telling me we can’t wait.” It was the best moment of his campaign.

Obama was financially outmatched. Although he raised about six hundred thousand dollars, sustained television advertising in Chicago cost between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand dollars a week, according to Dan Shomon, Obama’s campaign manager at the time. A series of unusual events defined the race. A few months before the election, Rush’s twenty-nine-year-old son, Huey Rich, was shot and killed, which made the incumbent a figure of sympathy, and in the final weeks of the campaign Rush’s father died. Obama made a serious misstep when, visiting his grandmother in Hawaii, he missed a crucial vote on gun-control legislation in Springfield. Even worse, on the day of the vote a column by Obama about how the gun bill was “sorely needed” appeared in the *Hyde Park Herald*, under the headline “IDEOLOGUES FRUSTRATE GUN LAW.” Obama protested that his daughter was ill and unable to travel, and that he saw his grandmother, who lived alone, only once a year, but the press treated the trip as a tropical vacation.

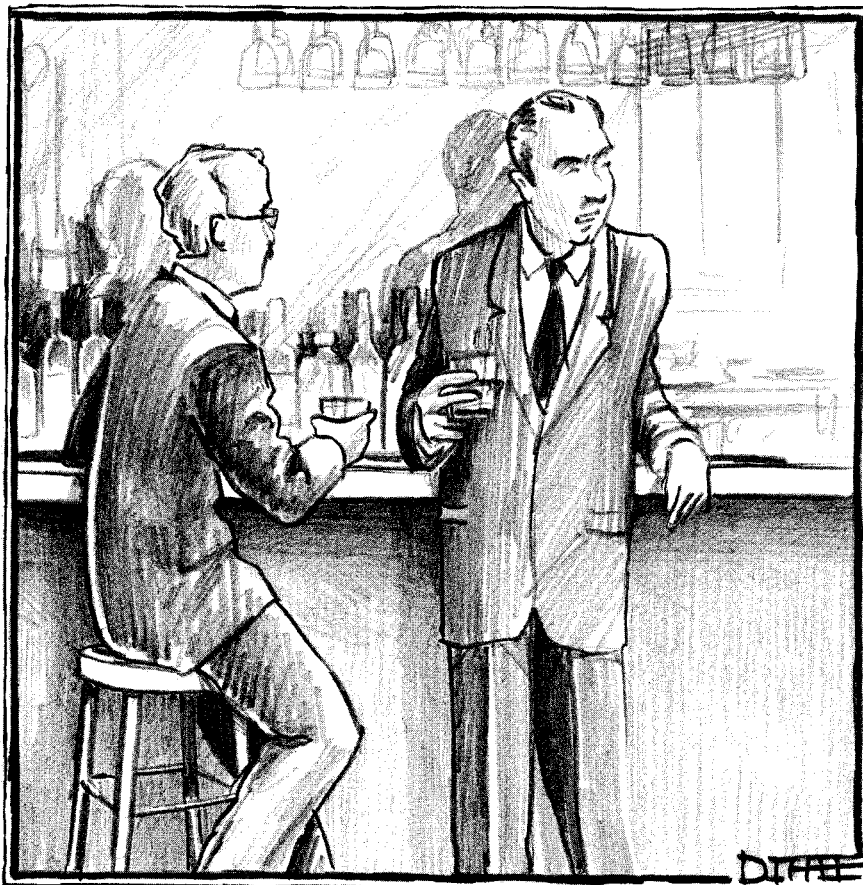
Obama lost by thirty-one points—a humiliating defeat. On Election Night, at the Ramada Inn where he had begun his political career, he sounded dejected, hinting that he might leave politics. “I’ve got to make assessments about where we go from here,” he said. “We need a new style of politics to deal with the issues that are important to the people. What’s not clear to me is whether I should do that as an elected official or by influencing government in ways that actually improve people’s lives.” The defeat marked not so much the beginning of a new style of politics for Obama as the beginning of Obama’s mastery of the old style of politics.

Obama had misread the political dynamics of Rush’s unsuccessful mayoral campaign. “He thought he would get some help from Daley because Rush had run against Daley for mayor,” Mikva said. “He thought that Daley might use the opportunity to get even. That’s not the way the Daleys work. It’s not the way the machine works. When Barack went in to see the Mayor, whom he knew slightly, Daley said what his old man used to say: ‘Good luck!’”

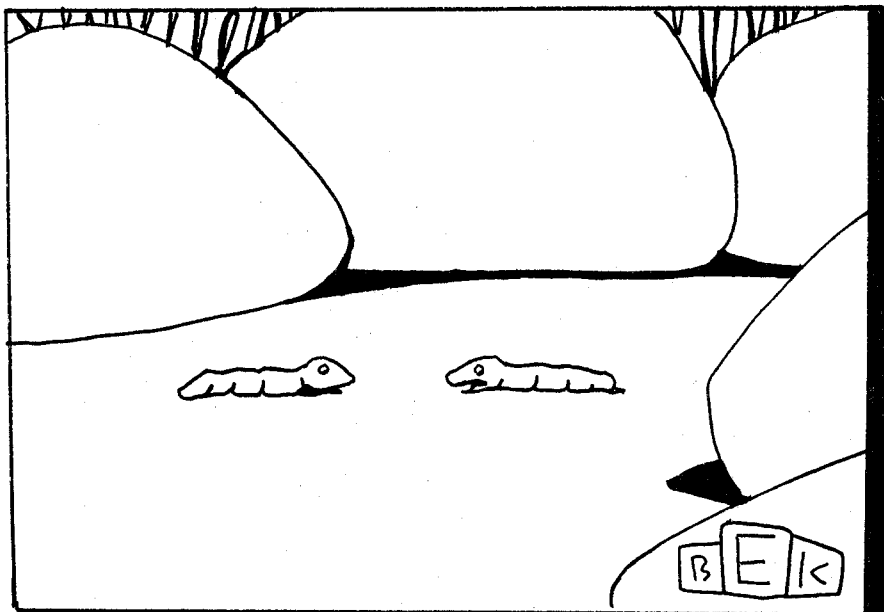
Mayor Daley concurred. “Bobby Rush was very strong,” he said. “When you lose a race, you can be strong in another avenue, and he was always strong in his congressional district. It was a learning experience when I lost to Harold Washington. The next day, I endorsed him.” He added, “You learn from defeat. If you don’t learn from defeat, then you go away as a sour politician—you think that people turned on you. Barack Obama understood that. The lesson from that campaign is you can’t just run for any office saying you thought someone lost an election and you thought they were weak. He realized that and he rededicated himself.”

THE INNER SANCTUM

Obama learned the exact nature of his appeal, as well as his handicaps. Unlike Obama’s State Senate district, where the University of Chicago and the multicultural Hyde Park produced most of the votes, Rush’s congressional district extended deep into black neighborhoods where Obama was unknown. His academic background was a burden,



“I’ve got a trophy wife, but she isn’t what you’d call first place.”



"We have a share in an apple."

too. Will Burns explained, "Even though the University of Chicago is one of the largest employers on the South Side of Chicago, it is seen by some, particularly black nationalists, as a bastion of white political power, as a huge entity that doesn't take into account the interests of the community, that doesn't have a full democratic partnership with the community, and does what it wants to the community in maintaining clear boundaries about where black people are. It's seen as an expansive force, trying to expand into Bronzeville and into Woodlawn"—historically black neighborhoods adjacent to Hyde Park—"and put poor blacks out of the area. The University of Chicago is not a brand that helps you if you're trying to get votes on the South Side of Chicago."

Obama's fund-raising success and his professional networks were also viewed with suspicion. Chicago is still a city of villages, and Obama was adept at gliding back and forth between the South Side, where he campaigned for votes, and the wealthy Gold Coast, the lakefront neighborhood of high-rise condominiums and deluxe shopping, where he raised money. One day in Hyde Park, I mentioned the name Bettylu Saltzman (the Project Vote supporter and daughter of a Bulls owner) to Lois Friedberg-Dobry (the South Side operator). "I don't run in those circles," she said. Later, over lunch with Saltzman

at a café in a gourmet supermarket on the Gold Coast, I mentioned the Dobrys and Obama's Independent Voters of Illinois friends, and she said, "You know, the North Side and the South Side of Chicago—it's like two different worlds."

A South Side operator named Al Kindle, a large man with a booming voice, was a field operator for Obama's race against Rush. He had helped elect Harold Washington, and he saw Obama's congressional campaign from the street level. We met one evening at Calypso Café, a Caribbean restaurant that Obama has said is his favorite place to eat in Hyde Park, and Kindle described some of the worst moments in the campaign. "The accusations were that Obama was sent here and owned by the Jews," Kindle said. "That he was here to steal the black vote and steal black land and that he was represented by the—as they were called—'the white man.' And that Obama wasn't black enough and didn't know the black experience, the black community. It was quite deafening in terms of how they went after Alderman Preckwinkle and myself. People would say, 'Oh, Kindle, man, we trust you, you being fooled. Obama's got you fooled.' And some people called me a traitor."

The loss taught Obama a great deal about the components of his natural coalition. According to Dan Shomon, the

first poll that Obama conducted revealed that the demographic he could win over most easily was white voters. Obama, who hadn't shown any particular gift for oratory in the race, now learned to shed his stiff approach to campaigning—described by Preckwinkle as that of an "arrogant academic." Mikva told me, "The first time I heard him talk to a black church, he was very professorial, more so even than he was in the white community. There was no joking, no self-deprecation, no style. It didn't go over well at all."

But, as he had in his 1996 campaign, Obama had attracted a young and zealous corps of campaign workers. "I remember one of the candidates in the race used to talk about how crazed our volunteers were, because they were passionate, energized," Will Burns said. "You'd come by the office on Eighty-seventh Street and there'd be a bunch of guys with no teeth waiting to get their next Old Grand-dad and then these Shiraz-drinking, *Nation*-reading, *T.N.R.*-quoting young black folk. It was a random-ass mix. It was beautiful, though. When I see the crowds now, they're very reminiscent of what was happening then."

Emil Jones told me that, after 2000, Obama moved decisively away from being pigeonholed as an inner-city pol. During one debate with Rush, he noted that he and the other candidates were all "progressive, urban Democrats." Even though he lost, that primary taught him that he might be something more than that. "He learned that for Barack Obama it was not the type of district that he was well suited for," Jones said. "The type of campaign that he had to run to win that district is not Barack Obama. It was a predominantly African-American district. It was a district where you had to campaign solely on those issues. And Barack did not campaign that way, and so as a result he lost. Which was good." Meaning, it was good for Barack Obama.

One day in the spring of 2001, about a year after the loss to Rush, Obama walked into the Stratton Office Building, in Springfield, a shabby nineteen-fifties government workspace for state officials next to the regal state capitol. He went upstairs to a room that Democrats in Springfield called "the inner sanctum." Only about ten Democratic staffers had access; entry required an elaborate ritual—

fingerprint scanners and codes punched into a keypad. The room was large, and unremarkable except for an enormous printer and an array of computers with big double monitors. On the screens that spring day were detailed maps of Chicago, and Obama and a Democratic consultant named John Corrigan sat in front of a terminal to draw Obama a new district. Corrigan was the Democrat in charge of drawing all Chicago districts, and he also happened to have volunteered for Obama in the campaign against Rush.

Obama's former district had been drawn by Republicans after the 1990 census. But, after 2000, Illinois Democrats won the right to redistrict the state. Partisan redistricting remains common in American politics, and, while it outrages a losing party, it has so far survived every legal challenge. In the new century, mapping technology has become so precise and the available demographic data so rich that politicians are able to choose the kinds of voter they want to represent, right down to individual homes. A close look at the post-2000 congressional map of Bobby Rush's district reveals that it tears through Hyde Park in a curious series of irregular turns. One of those lines bypasses Obama's address by two blocks. Rush, or someone looking out for his interests, had carved the upstart Obama out of Rush's congressional district.

In truth, Rush had little to worry about; Obama was already on a different political path. Like every other Democratic legislator who entered the inner sanctum, Obama began working on his "ideal map." Corrigan remembers two things about the district that he and Obama drew. First, it retained Obama's Hyde Park base—he had managed to beat Rush in Hyde Park—then swooped upward along the lakefront and toward downtown. By the end of the final redistricting process, his new district bore little resemblance to his old one. Rather than jutting far to the west, like a long thin dagger, into a swath of poor black neighborhoods of bungalow homes, Obama's map now shot north, encompassing about half of the Loop, whose southern portion was beginning to be transformed by developers like Tony Rezko, and stretched far up Michigan Avenue and into the Gold Coast, covering much of the city's economic heart, its

main retail thoroughfares, and its finest museums, parks, skyscrapers, and lakefront apartment buildings. African-Americans still were a majority, and the map contained some of the poorest sections of Chicago, but Obama's new district was wealthier, whiter, more Jewish, less blue-collar, and better educated. It also included one of the highest concentrations of Republicans in Chicago.

"It was a radical change," Corrigan said. The new district was a natural fit for the candidate that Obama was in the process of becoming. "He saw that when we were doing fund-raisers in the Rush campaign his appeal to, quite frankly, young white professionals was dramatic."

Obama's personal political concerns were not the only factor driving the process. During the previous round of remapping, in 1991, Republicans had created Chicago districts where African-Americans were the overwhelming majority, packing the greatest number of loyal Democrats into the fewest districts. A decade later, Democrats tried to spread the African-American vote among more districts. The idea was to create enough Democratic-leaning districts so that the Party could take control of the state legislature. That goal was fine with Obama; his new district offered promising, untapped constituencies for him as he considered his next political move. "The exposure he would get to some of the folks that were on boards of the museums and C.E.O.s of some of the companies that he would represent would certainly help him in the long run," Corrigan said.

In the end, Obama's North Side fund-raising base and his South Side political base were united in one district. He now represented Hyde Park operators like Lois Friedberg-Dobry as well as Gold Coast doyennes like Bettylu Saltzman, and his old South Side street operative Al Kindle as well as his future consultant

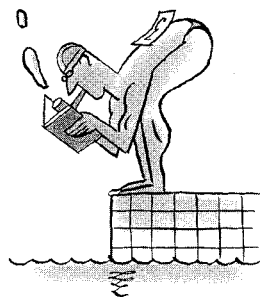
David Axelrod. In an article in the *Hyde Park Herald* about how "partisan" and "undemocratic" Illinois redistricting had become, Obama was asked for his views. As usual, he was candid. "There is a conflict of interest built into the process," he said. "Incumbents drawing their own maps will inevitably try to advantage themselves."

The partisan redistricting of Illinois may have been the most important event in Obama's early political life. It immediately gave him the two things he needed to run for the Senate in 2004: money and power. He needed to have several times as much cash as he'd raised for his losing congressional race in 2000, and many of the state's top donors now lived or worked in his district. More important, the statewide gerrymandering made it likely that Obama's party would take over the State Senate in 2002, an event that would provide him with a platform from which to craft a legislative record in time for the campaign.

Obama's political activity from 2001 to 2004 reveals a man transformed. The loss to Rush drained him of much of the naïveté he once exuded. For instance, when Obama arrived in Springfield, in 1996, he was still enamored of the spirit of community organizing and determined to apply its principles as a legislator. In an interview with the *Chicago Reader* in 1995, he laid out this vision:

People are hungry for community; they miss it. They are hungry for change. What if a politician were to see his job as that of an organizer, as part teacher and part advocate, one who does not sell voters short but who educates them about the real choices before them? As an elected public official, for instance, I could bring church and community leaders together easier than I could as a community organizer or lawyer. We would come together to form concrete economic development strategies, take advantage of existing laws and structures, and create bridges and bonds within all sectors of the community. We must form grass-root structures that would hold me and other elected officials more accountable for their actions.

Obama took at least one concrete step to turn this notion of the legislator as community organizer into a reality. In his first column in the *Hyde Park Herald*, the same one in which he addressed welfare, he announced that he was "organizing citizens' committees" to help him shape legislation. He asked his constituents to call his office if they wanted to partici-



pate. That kind of airy talk about changing politics gave way almost immediately to the realities of the job. I asked a longtime Obama friend what ever became of the committees. "They never really got off the ground," he said. By 2001, if there was any maxim from community organizing that Obama lived by, it was the Realpolitik commandment of Saul Alinsky, the founding practitioner of community organizing, to operate in "the world as it is and not as we would like it to be."

In electoral politics, operating in the world as it is means raising money. Obama expanded the reach of his fundraising. Every network that he penetrated brought him access to another. Christie Hefner, Hugh Hefner's daughter, who runs Playboy Enterprises from the fifteenth floor of a lakefront building, explained how it worked. Hefner is a member of a group called Ladies Who Lunch—nineteen Chicago women, most of them wealthy, who see themselves as talent scouts and angel investors for up-and-coming liberal candidates and activists. They interview prospects over a meal, often in a private dining room at the Arts Club of Chicago. Obama's friend Bettylu Saltzman, a Ladies Who Lunch member, introduced Obama to the group when he was preparing his Senate run. Hefner, who declined to support Obama in 2000, was ready to help him when he came calling in 2002.

Not long ago, Hefner and I talked in her office; we were seated at a granite table strewn with copies of *Playboy*. "I was very proud to be able to introduce him during the Senate race to a lot of people who have turned out to be important and valuable to him, not just here but in New York and L.A.," Hefner explained. She mentioned Thomas Friedman, the *Times* columnist, and Norman Lear, the television producer. "I try and think about people who I think should know him."

THE SPEECH

One insight into the transition that Obama was making during the short period between his painful loss to Bobby Rush and his Senate victory can be gained by comparing his reactions to the two major national-security crises of the time: the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the Iraq war. For many Illinois state legislators, September 11th

was not an event that required much response. The attacks occurred just before an important deadline in the redistricting process. John Corrigan, the Democratic consultant in charge of redistricting, told me that he spent September 12th talking to many legislators, Obama not among them. "It was like nothing had happened," he said. "Everybody came in and all they cared about was their districts. It wasn't any one particular legislator from any one particular community. I learned a lot about state government. Their job was not to respond to September 11th. They were more worried about making sure that they had a district that they could run in for reelection."

Obama's response to the event was published on September 19th in the *Hyde Park Herald*:

Even as I hope for some measure of peace and comfort to the bereaved families, I must also hope that we as a nation draw some measure of wisdom from this tragedy. Certain immediate lessons are clear, and we must act upon those lessons decisively. We need to step up security at our airports. We must reexamine the effectiveness of our intelligence networks. And we must be resolute in identifying the perpetrators of these heinous acts and dismantling their organizations of destruction.

We must also engage, however, in the more difficult task of understanding the sources of such madness. The essence of this tragedy, it seems to me, derives from a fundamental absence of empathy on the part of the attackers: an inability to imagine, or connect with, the humanity and suffering of others. Such a failure of empathy, such numbness to the pain of a child or the desperation of a parent, is not innate; nor, history tells us, is it unique to a particular culture, religion, or ethnicity. It may find expression in a particular brand of violence, and may be channeled by particular demagogues or fanatics. Most often, though, it grows out of a climate of poverty and ignorance, helplessness and despair.

We will have to make sure, despite our rage, that any U.S. military action takes into account the lives of innocent civilians abroad. We will have to be unwavering in opposing bigotry or discrimination directed against neighbors and friends of Middle Eastern descent. Finally, we will have to devote far more attention to the monumental task of raising the hopes and prospects of embittered children across the globe—children not just in the Middle East, but also in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and within our own shores.

A year later, Obama agreed to speak at an antiwar rally in downtown Chicago, organized by Bettylu Saltzman and some friends, who, over Chinese food, had decided to stage the protest. Saltzman asked John Mearsheimer, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago—and, later, the co-author of the controver-

sial book "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy"—to speak, but he couldn't make it. "He was one of the main people we wanted, but he was speaking at the University of Wisconsin that day," Saltzman said. Then she called her rabbi and then Barack Obama. Michelle answered the phone and passed the message on to her husband, who was out of town.

Saltzman also called Marilyn Katz, who runs a Chicago public-relations firm and is close to Mayor Daley. Katz managed to get Jesse Jackson as a speaker, and handled many of the organizing details. Katz, a petite woman who was, improbably, the head of security for S.D.S. at the 1968 Democratic Convention, described what she felt the political mood was at the time of the rally. "Professors are being turned in on college campuses, Bush's ratings are eighty-seven per cent," she said. "Among my friends, there hasn't been an antiwar demonstration in twenty years. There's huge repression, Bush has got all this legislation. They're talking about lists, they're denying people entry into the country. . . . Bush's numbers were tremendously high, but we had no choice. Unless we wanted to live in a country that was fascist."

Despite the politics of Saltzman and Katz, Obama's now famous speech was notable for the absence of the traditional tropes of the antiwar left. In his biography of Obama, David Mendell, noting that Obama's speech occurred a few months before the official declaration of his U.S. Senate candidacy, suggests that the decision to publicly oppose the war in Iraq was a calculated political move intended to win favor with Saltzman. The suggestion seems dubious; the politics were more in the framing of his opposition, not the decision itself. As Saltzman told me, "He was a Hyde Park state senator. He had to oppose the war!"

The sensitive language of his September 11th statement was gone. Instead, Obama distanced himself from the pacifist activists who were surely present. "Let me begin by saying that although this has been billed as an antiwar rally, I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances," he told the crowd. He then went further, defending justifiable wars in almost glorious terms. "The Civil War was one of the bloodiest in history, and yet it was only through the crucible of the sword, the

sacrifice of multitudes, that we could begin to perfect this union, and drive the scourge of slavery from our soil. I don't oppose all wars. My grandfather signed up for a war the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed, fought in Patton's Army. He saw the dead and dying across the fields of Europe; he heard the stories of fellow-troops who first entered Auschwitz and Treblinka. He fought in the name of a larger freedom, part of that arsenal of democracy that triumphed over evil, and he did not fight in vain. I don't oppose all wars." It took some nerve to tweak the crowd in this way. After all, it was unlikely that many of the protesters knew who Obama was, and in a lengthy write-up of the event in the *Chicago Tribune* the following day he was not mentioned. Yet the speech reads as if it had been written for a much bigger audience.

During this period, Obama also became more of a strategist, someone increasingly comfortable discussing the finer points of polls, message, and fundraising. According to his friends, Obama does not delegate campaign planning. Marty Nesbitt, his best friend, who became a familiar presence on the campaign trail this spring, flying in to play basketball with Obama on primary days, described the first meeting in which Obama pitched the idea of running for the U.S. Senate to his closest advisers and fundraisers. This was in 2002, and things seemed to be going his way. The incumbent Republican, Peter Fitzgerald, was unpopular, and the race was attracting a large field of Democrats.

"He didn't start telling people he was interested in running for Senate until he figured out what the road map was," Nesbitt said. "He had a good sense of the odds, and he knew there were certain things that had to happen. . . . The first thing he said was, 'O.K., nobody with approval ratings like this has ever been reelected, so it's not gonna be him, right?' And then he said there's a bunch of candidates who can potentially run, one of whom was Carol Moseley Braun. And he said, 'If she runs, I probably don't have a chance, because there's gonna be certain loyalty within the African-American community to her, even though she had some mistakes, and I'm probably not gonna get those African-American votes, which I need as my base if I'm gonna win. So if she runs, I don't run.'

"Then he just laid out an economic analysis. It becomes about money, because he knew that if people knew his story they would view him as a better candidate than anybody else he thought might be in the field. And so he said, 'Therefore, if you raise five million dollars, I have a fifty-per-cent chance of winning. If you raise seven million dollars, I have a seventy-per-cent chance of winning. If you raise ten million dollars, I guarantee victory.'"

That year, he gained his first high-level experience in a statewide campaign when he advised the victorious gubernatorial candidate Rod Blagojevich, another politician with a funny name and a message of reform. Rahm Emanuel, a congressman from Chicago and a friend of Obama's, told me that he, Obama, David Wilhelm, who was Blagojevich's campaign co-chair, and another Blagojevich aide were the top strategists of Blagojevich's victory. He and Obama "participated in a small group that met weekly when Rod was running for governor," Emanuel said. "We basically laid out the general election, Barack and I and these two." A spokesman for Blagojevich confirmed Emanuel's account, although David Wilhelm, who now works for Obama, said that Emanuel had overstated Obama's role. "There was an advisory council that was inclu-

sive of Rahm and Barack but not limited to them," Wilhelm said, and he disputed the notion that Obama was "an architect or one of the principal strategists."

David Axelrod, the preeminent strategist in the state, declined to work for Blagojevich. "He had been my client and I had a very good relationship with him, but I didn't sign on to the governor's race," Axelrod said. "Obviously he won, but I had concerns about it. . . . I was concerned about whether he was ready for that. Not so much for the race but for governing. I was concerned about some of the folks—I was concerned about how the race was being approached." Axelrod's unease was warranted. Blagojevich and people close to him have been tied to a seemingly endless series of scandals. The trial of Tony Rezko revealed that Rezko used his influence in the Blagojevich administration to profit from companies seeking business with the state. There is speculation that Blagojevich will be the next governor to be indicted, and the Democratic Speaker of the Illinois House, Michael Madigan, has raised the issue of impeachment.

Part of Obama's political success is that he has been able to exploit relationships with important yet ethically dubious figures in Illinois while still maintaining his independence. In some ways, this is an





"He misspoke, I misheard, then shots rang out."

Illinois tradition. When the liberal reformer Adlai Stevenson ran for governor, in 1948, one Democratic boss reportedly noted that he would "perfume the ticket." The earnest Lincoln scholar Paul Simon stood out in the Senate for his moral rectitude and his commitment to good government even as his state wallowed in scandal. "The political bosses knew they had to have what they used to call in business a loss leader—the showcasing," Don Rose, the Chicago political consultant, said. "The car that you sold for under its value for advertising purposes. While you had at the top of your ticket a shining star, under that it was like turning over a rock."

Obama has said little about the scandals in his home state. Besides the Rezko and Blagojevich cases, there have been indictments and convictions against the Daley administration concerning hiring and contracting practices. Getting close to the sullied political leadership in Illinois was probably an unavoidable cost of winning the U.S. Senate seat. Emil Jones told me that another of the lessons Obama learned after his 2000 loss was the importance of political sponsorship.

Jones and Obama have had a complicated history. As a community organizer, Obama led a protest against Jones, and in his memoir he unflatteringly describes

him as an "old ward heeler." ("I guess he figured I was part of the establishment," Jones told me, objecting to the description. "He didn't know too much about politics and he was very idealistic.") Years later, Jones backed Palmer over Obama in the State Senate race. But their relationship changed dramatically after 2000. When Obama praised Jones as "my political godfather," Jones began using the theme music from "The Godfather" as his cell-phone ringtone.

I spoke to Jones in his office minutes after he left a meeting with the Governor, a close ally whom he has defended during the recent difficulties. Jones, who is seventy-two, is a former sewer inspector and insurance salesman; he speaks in a soft rumble and practices politics in a characteristically Chicago manner. He recently explained his support for a proposal to increase the salaries of legislators by saying, "I need a pay raise." In May, the Chicago *Sun-Times* reported that Jones "provided himself with tens of thousands of dollars in interest-free loans from his campaign fund," which, the report noted, is not illegal in Illinois but is "highly unusual." A spokesman for Jones said that Jones "has always made it a practice to pay back the loans and continues to do so."

Being in the majority has proved hard for the Democrats. They were having trouble agreeing on a budget deal, and the newspapers were filled with those murmurs of impeachment. For Jones, discussing his long history with the presumptive Democratic Presidential nominee—from target of the youthful Obama's anti-establishment organizing to political patron in Springfield—seemed a welcome relief, a reminder of happier times for Democrats in Illinois.

"When he ran that race against Bobby Rush, he had no one supporting him who had political influence over others and whom people respected, so he was out there as a lone wolf in that race," Jones said. That's why, in 2002, as Obama planned his next campaign, he sought out Jones. "We never discussed it, but he had to analyze that race and recognize he had no other powerful elected officials supporting him," Jones said. "And so he felt I could be very, very key if he was going to make the run for the U.S. Senate."

"In politics, you must know who is connected to whom," Jones continued. "The Mayor of Chicago and the father of Dan Hynes"—one of Obama's primary opponents—"when they were both state senators they shared an apartment together in Springfield, so there's a relationship between those two. And the Governor? One of his chief financial supporters in his first run was also in the race. I work with both the Mayor and the Governor, so, by my jumping in strong behind Barack Obama, they didn't want to alienate me and have me upset with them, so they stayed out of the race."

In the State Senate, Jones did something even more important for Obama. He pushed him forward as the key sponsor of some of the Party's most important legislation, even though the move did not sit well with some colleagues who had plugged away in the minority on bills that Obama now championed as part of the majority. "Because he had been in the minority, Barack didn't have a legislative record to run on, and there was a buildup of all these great ideas that the Republicans kept in the rules committee when they were in the majority," Burns said. "Jones basically gave Obama the space to do what Obama wanted to do. Emil made it clear to people that it would be good for them." Burns, who at that point

was working for Jones, was assigned to keep an eye on Obama's floor votes, which, because he was a Senate candidate, would be under closer scrutiny. The Obama-Jones alliance worked. In one year, 2003, Obama passed much of the legislation, including bills on racial profiling, death-penalty reform, and expanded health insurance for children, that he highlighted in his Senate campaign.

ONE STEP AHEAD

Perhaps the greatest misconception about Barack Obama is that he is some sort of anti-establishment revolutionary. Rather, every stage of his political career has been marked by an eagerness to accommodate himself to existing institutions rather than tear them down or replace them. When he was a community organizer, he channelled his work through Chicago's churches, because they were the main bases of power on the South Side. He was an agnostic when he started, and the work led him to become a practicing Christian. At Harvard, he won the presidency of the *Law Review* by appealing to the conservatives on the selection panel. In Springfield, rather than challenge the Old Guard Democratic leaders, Obama built a mutually beneficial relationship with them. "You have the power to make a United States senator," he told Emil Jones in 2003. In his downtime, he played poker with lobbyists and Republican lawmakers. In Washington, he has been a cautious senator and, when he arrived, made a point of not defining himself as an opponent of the Iraq war.

Like many politicians, Obama is paradoxical. He is by nature an incrementalist, yet he has laid out an ambitious first-term agenda (energy independence, universal health care, withdrawal from Iraq). He campaigns on reforming a broken political process, yet he has always played politics by the rules as they exist, not as he would like them to exist. He runs as an outsider, but he has succeeded by mastering the inside game. He is ideologically a man of the left, but at times he has been genuinely deferential to core philosophical insights of the right.

Obama's establishment inclinations have alienated some old friends. During the 2004 Senate primary, Obama sometimes reminded voters of his anti-

machine credentials, but at the same time he shrewdly wrote to Mayor Daley's brother, William, who had backed one of Obama's primary opponents, asking for his support if he won the primary. As he outgrew the provincial politics of Hyde Park, he became closer to the Mayor, and this accommodation, as well as his unwillingness to condemn the corruption scandals ensnaring Daley and Blagojevich, both of whom he supported for reelection, have some of his original supporters feeling alienated and angry. "I am not thrilled with Barack, simply because we elected him as an Independent, and he switched over to Daley," Alan Dobry said. Ivory Mitchell, speaking of Obama's Senate race, said, "When he won the primary out here and he went downtown, it appears as though Daley took over the campaign for him. . . . We were excluded." David Axelrod told me, in response, that some of the Independents on the South Side blame Daley for just about anything. "I think there's kind of this Wizard of Oz mystique," he said. "Daley had virtually no role in the Senate campaign."

Another transition from primary to general election is now under way for Obama, and it is causing him a similar set of problems, all of which stem from a realization among his supporters that superheroes don't become President; politicians do. Judging by the reaction to Obama's most recent decisions—his willingness to support legislation to modify the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, his rightward shift on interpreting the Second Amendment, his decision to "refine" his Iraq policies—some voters will be crushed by this realization and others will be relieved. In another episode that has Obama's old friends feeling frustrated, Obama recently blamed his first campaign manager, Carol Anne Harwell, for reporting on a 1996 questionnaire that Obama favored a ban on handguns. According to her friends, Harwell was furious that the campaign made her Obama's scapegoat. "She got, as the saying goes, run over by a bus," Lois Friedberg-Dobry said.

Obama's rise has often appeared effortless. His offstage tactics—when he is engaged in the sometimes combative work of a politician—are rarely glimpsed by outsiders. Penny Pritzker, a friend and fund-raiser for Obama, remembers meeting with him at her office in 2006 to dis-

cuss his Presidential campaign. Pritzker, whose family, one of the wealthiest in Chicago, owns the Hyatt hotel chain, was as crucial to Obama's next campaign as Toni Preckwinkle's was to his first. "We were talking about whether he was ready to do this or not," Pritzker told me. She was blunt, telling Obama, "As I see it, the two things that you're going to need to address are your executive leadership skills, because your résumé doesn't have that in it, and the second would be your credentials in national security." Obama returned with an organizational chart indicating how the campaign would be structured—one of his great tactical advantages over the disorganized Clinton campaign—along with a list of advisers. Pritzker agreed to become his finance chair. Obama has frequently been one step ahead of his friends and the public in anticipating his own rise. Perhaps it is all those people he has met over the years who told him that he would be President one day. The Reverend Alvin Love, a South Side Baptist minister and a longtime Obama friend, said that Obama called him in December, 2006, seeking advice about whether to run for President. "My dad told me that you've got to strike while the iron is hot," Love recalls saying, and Obama replied, "The iron can't get any hotter."

Obama has always had a healthy understanding of the reaction he elicits in others, and he learned to use it to his advantage a very long time ago. Marty Nesbitt remembers Obama's utter calm the day he gave his celebrated speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, in Boston, which made him an international celebrity and a potential 2008 Presidential candidate. "We were walking down the street late in the afternoon," Nesbitt told me. "And this crowd was building behind us, like it was Tiger Woods at the Masters."

"Barack, man, you're like a rock star," Nesbitt said.

"Yeah, if you think it's bad today, wait until tomorrow," Obama replied.

"What do you mean?"

"My speech," Obama said, "is pretty good." ♦

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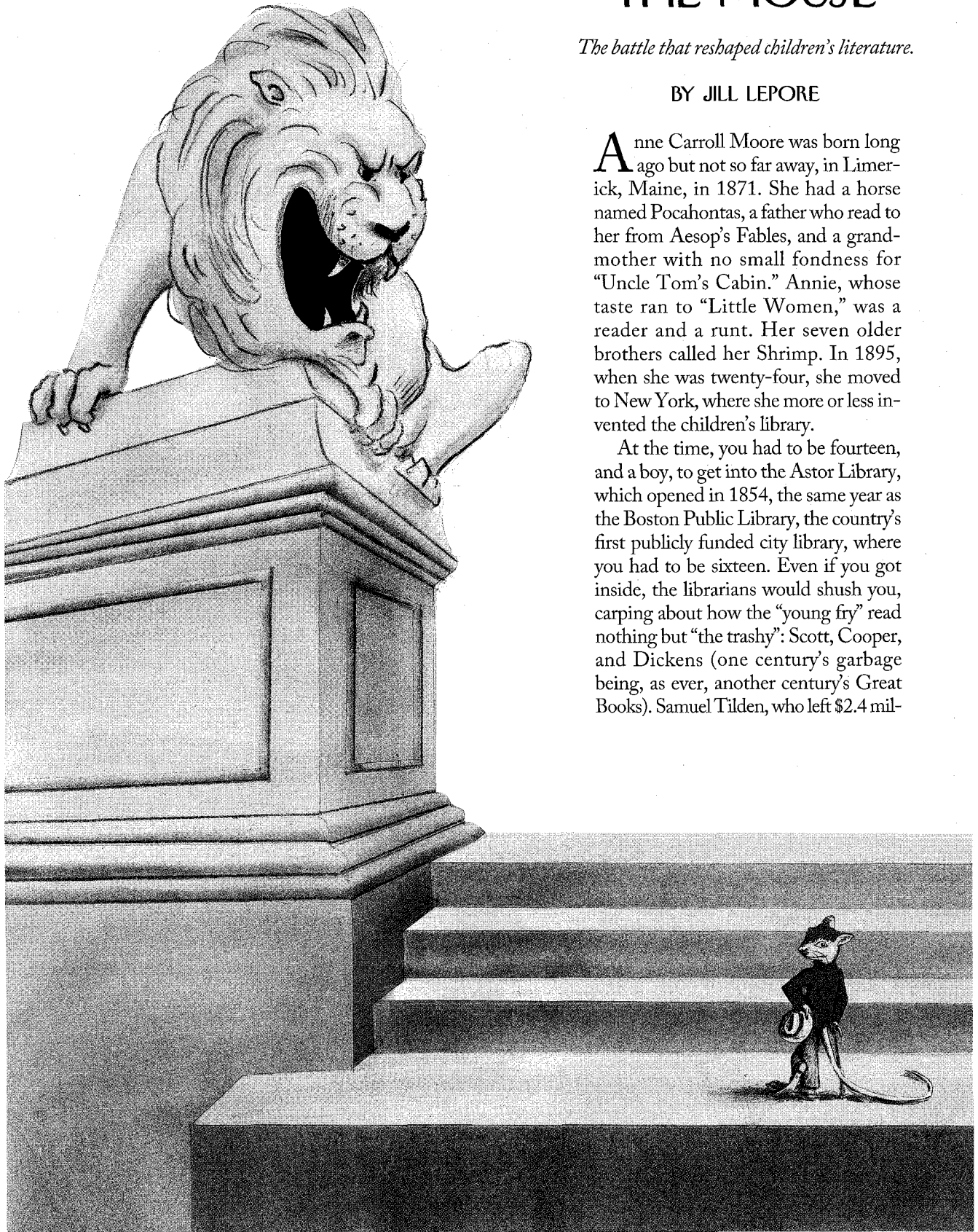
THE LION AND THE MOUSE

The battle that reshaped children's literature.

BY JILL LEPORE

Anne Carroll Moore was born long ago but not so far away, in Limerick, Maine, in 1871. She had a horse named Pocahontas, a father who read to her from Aesop's Fables, and a grandmother with no small fondness for "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Annie, whose taste ran to "Little Women," was a reader and a runt. Her seven older brothers called her Shrimp. In 1895, when she was twenty-four, she moved to New York, where she more or less invented the children's library.

At the time, you had to be fourteen, and a boy, to get into the Astor Library, which opened in 1854, the same year as the Boston Public Library, the country's first publicly funded city library, where you had to be sixteen. Even if you got inside, the librarians would shush you, carping about how the "young fry" read nothing but "the trashy": Scott, Cooper, and Dickens (one century's garbage being, as ever, another century's Great Books). Samuel Tilden, who left \$2.4 mil-



lion to establish a free library in New York, nearly changed his mind when he found out that ninety per cent of the books checked out of the Boston Public Library were fiction. Meanwhile, libraries were popping up in American cities and towns like crocuses at first melt. Between 1881 and 1917, Andrew Carnegie underwrote the construction of more than sixteen hundred public libraries in the United States, buildings from which children were routinely turned away, because they needed to be protected from morally corrupting books, especially novels. In 1894, at the annual meeting of the American Library Association, the Milwaukee Public Library's Lutie Stearns read a "Report on the Reading of the Young." What if libraries were to set aside special books for children, Stearns wondered, shelved in separate rooms for children, staffed by librarians who actually liked children?

In 1896, Anne Carroll Moore was given the task of running just such an experiment, the Children's Library of the Pratt Institute, in Brooklyn, built at a time when the Brooklyn schools had a policy that "children below the third grade do not read well enough to profit from the use of library books." Moore toured settlement houses and kindergartens (also a new thing), and made a list of what she needed: tables and chairs sized for children; plants, especially ones with flowers; art work; and very good books. The kids lined up around the block.

The cornerstone of the New York Public Library was laid in 1902, at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue. Four years later, after the library's directors established a Department of Work with Children, they hired Moore to serve as its superintendent, a position in which she not only oversaw the children's programs at all the branch libraries but also planned the Central Children's Room. After the library opened, in 1911, its Children's Room became a pint-sized paradise, with its pots of pansies and pussy willows and oak tables and coveted window seats, so low to the floor that even the shortest legs didn't dangle.

Much of what Moore did in that room had never been done before, or half as well. She brought in storytellers and, in her first year, organized two hundred story hours (and ten times as

many two years later). She compiled a list of twenty-five hundred standard titles in children's literature. She won the right to grant borrowing privileges to children; by 1913, children's books accounted for a third of all the volumes borrowed from New York's branch libraries. Against the prevailing sentiment of the day, she believed that her job was to give "to the child of foreign parentage a feeling of pride in the beautiful things of the country his parents have left." She celebrated the holidays of immigrants (reading Irish poetry aloud, for instance, on St. Patrick's Day) and stocked the shelves with books in French, German, Russian, and Swedish. In 1924, she hired the African-American writer Nella Larsen to head the Children's Room in Harlem. In each of the library's branches, Moore abolished age restrictions. Down came the "Silence" signs, up went framed prints of the work of children's-book illustrators. "Do not expect or demand perfect quiet," she instructed her staff. "The education of children begins at the open shelves." In place of locked cabinets, she provided every library with a big black ledger; if you could sign your name, you could borrow a book. Moore considered signing the ledger something between an act of citizenship and a sacrament, to be undertaken only after reading a pledge: "When I write my name in this book I promise to take good care of the books I use in the Library and at home, and to obey the rules of the Library." During both the First and Second World Wars, soldiers on leave in the city climbed the steps past Patience and Fortitude, walked into the Children's Room, and asked to see the black books from years past. They wanted to look up their names, to trace the record of a childhood lost, an inky, smudged once-upon-a-time.

In the first half of the twentieth century, no one wielded more power in the field of children's literature than Moore, a librarian in a city of publishers. She never lacked for an opinion. "Dull in a new way," she labelled books that she despised. When, in 1938, William R. Scott brought her copies of his press's new books, tricked out with pop-ups and bells and buttons, Moore snapped, "Truck! Mr. Scott. They are truck!" Her verdict, not any editor's, not any book-

seller's, sealed a book's fate. She kept a rubber stamp at her desk that she used, liberally, while paging through publishers' catalogues: "Not recommended for purchase by expert." The end.

The end of Moore's influence came when, years later, she tried to block the publication of a book by E. B. White. Watching Moore stand in the way of "Stuart Little," White's editor, Ursula Nordstrom, remembered, was like watching a horse fall down, its spindly legs crumpling beneath its great weight.

E. B. White, born in Mount Vernon, New York, in 1899, was a generation Moore's junior. As a boy, he was frustrated that there were books in his town library he wasn't allowed to look at. He had a pet mouse; he thought he looked a little mousy himself. In 1909, when he was nine, he won a prize for a poem about a mouse. The New York Public Library opened the year he turned twelve and won a silver badge for "A Winter Walk," an essay published in *St. Nicholas*, a magazine that Moore stocked on the shelves of her Children's Room. White grew up and in 1917 went to Cornell, where he became the editor of the college paper, the *Cornell Daily Sun*. In 1918, Anne Carroll Moore wrote her first book review, in *The Bookman*. That review marks the birth of serious criticism of children's literature. (The next year saw still more firsts: the first Children's Book Week, organized by Moore, and the appointment of Louise Seaman—soon to be Louise Seaman Bechtel—to head the first children's department at a major publishing house, Macmillan. In 1922, the Newbery Medal was first awarded.) Moore's column ran in *The Bookman* until it folded, in 1926, the year after Harold Ross launched *The New Yorker*, where he hired White as a writer and a crackerjack thirty-two-year-old freelancer named Katharine Angell as a reader of manuscripts. Not long afterward, Angell became the magazine's fiction editor.

About this time, E. B. White fell asleep on a train and "dreamed of a small character who had the features of a mouse, was nicely dressed, courageous, and questing." White had eighteen nieces and nephews, who were always begging him to tell them a story,

but he shied away from making one up off the top of his head. Instead, he set to writing, and stocked a desk drawer with tales about his “mouse-child . . . the only fictional figure ever to have honored and disturbed my sleep.” He named him Stuart.

Anne Carroll Moore had an imaginary friend, too. “I have brought someone with me,” she would tell children, singsongy, as she fished out of her handbag a wooden doll she called Nicholas Knickerbocker. She even had letterhead made for him. “I’m the sorriest little Dutch boy you ever knew over your accident,” she once wrote, signing herself “Nicholas,” in a letter to Louise Seaman Bechtel. (When Moore forgot Nicholas in a taxi, her colleagues did not mourn his loss.)

In 1924, Moore published her own children’s book, “Nicholas: A Manhattan Christmas Story.” It begins with Nicholas’s Christmas Eve arrival in a New York Public Library Children’s Room filled with fairy creatures:

The Troll gave a leap from the Christmas Tree and landed right beside the Brownie in a corner of the window seat. Just then the Fifth Avenue window swung wide open and in walked a strange boy about eight inches high.

It has not aged well.

From 1924 to 1930, Moore reviewed children’s books for the New York *Herald Tribune*; beginning in 1936, her reviews also appeared in *The Horn Book*. She could be a tough critic, especially of books that violated her rules: “Books about girls should be as interesting as girls are” or “Avoid those histories that gain dramatic interest by appeal to prejudice. Especially true of American histories.” But merely in bothering to regularly criticize children’s books Moore was ahead of everyone. Only in 1927 did *The Saturday Review* begin running a twice-monthly column called “The Children’s Bookshop.” The *Times Book Review* didn’t routinely review children’s books until 1930. In 1928, *The New Yorker*’s Dorothy Parker, in her Constant Reader column, reviewed A. A. Milne’s “The House at Pooh Corner.” (Moore called another Pooh book “a nonsense story in the best tradition of the nursery.”) Pooh’s wasn’t just a Good Hum and a Hopeful Hum, Parker noted. It was a hummy hum. “And it is that word ‘hummy,’ my darlings,” Parker

wrote, “that marks the first place in ‘The House at Pooh Corner’ at which Tonsant Weader fwowed up.”

In 1929, E. B. White married Katharine Angell and, with his office mate, James Thurber, published his first book, a lampoon featuring fake Freudian sexologists, titled “Is Sex Necessary?” (Their answer: not strictly, no, but it beats raising begonias.) In 1933, when the Whites’ son, Joel, was three, Katharine, who also had two children from her first marriage, began writing an annual and sometimes semi-annual roundup of children’s books for *The New Yorker*. Katharine White’s taste in children’s literature, if it fell short of Tonsant Weader’s fwowing up, was more than spitting distance from Moore’s indulgence in the adventures of Troll, Brownie, and Nicholas Knickerbocker. White found an A. A. Milne introduction to Jean de Brunhoff’s “Travels of Babar” to be “an unnecessary and misleading condescension, since de Brunhoff is witty without being Poohish, and Babar is an elephant who can stand on his own feet.” She favored sturdy characters and spare prose. But there was something else at stake. White’s column, which she once titled “The Children’s Shelf,” called into question the very idea of a children’s library. Maybe all kids needed was a shelf?

Then, as now, some of the best prose and poetry, not to mention the best art, was to be found in books written for children—disciplined, inspired, elevated, even, by the constraints of the form. Katharine White loved many books for children; above all, she admired the beauty and lyricism of picture books and readers for the under-twelve set. But she had her doubts about books aimed at older kids:

It has always seemed to us that boys and girls who are worth their salt begin at twelve or thirteen to read, with a brilliant indiscriminate, every book they can lay their hands on. In the welter, they manage to read some good ones. A girl of twelve may take up Jane Austen, a boy Dickens; and you wonder how writers of juveniles have the brass to compete in this field, blithely announcing their works as “suitable for the child of twelve to fourteen.” Their implication is that everything else is distinctly unsuitable. Well, who knows? Suitability isn’t so simple.

And who decides what’s suitable, anyway? Parents? Librarians? Editors?

White had her own ideas about who should draw the line, if a line had to be drawn, between what was good for children, what was childish, and what was just plain rotten. About Anne Carroll Moore she once fumed, “Critic, my eye!”

Sometimes, books labelled juvenile are, instead, antique. Children’s literature, at least in the West, is utterly bound up in the medieval, as Seth Lerer, a Stanford literature professor, argues in “Children’s Literature: A Reader’s History from Aesop to Harry Potter.” Lots of books for kids are about the Middle Ages (everything from “The Hobbit” to “Robin Hood” and “Redwall”), but the conventions of the genre (allegory, moral fable, romance, and heavy-handed symbolism) are also themselves distinctly premodern. It’s not only that many books we shelve as “children’s literature”—Grimms’ Fairy Tales or “Gulliver’s Travels” or “Huck Finn”—were born as biting political satire, for adults; it’s also that books written for children in the twentieth century tend to be distinctly, willfully, and often delightfully antimodern. “The Phantom Tollbooth” has more in common with “The Pilgrim’s Progress” than it does with “On the Road.” Lurking in the stacks of every “children’s library” are dozens of literary impostors: satires, from ages past, hiding their fangs; and shiny new books, dressed up in some very old clothes.

Today, children’s book publishing—an industry richly described in Leonard S. Marcus’s excellent new book, “Minders of Make-Believe”—is one of the most profitable parts of the book business. But that industry exists only because, in much the same way that the nineteenth-century middle class invented childhood as we know it, early-twentieth-century writers, illustrators, editors, and publishers—and, most of all, Anne Carroll Moore—invented children’s literature. It would be convenient if White and Moore stood on either side of a divide between antimodernist and modernist writing. But things don’t really sort out along those lines. A better way of thinking about it might be to say that Anne Carroll Moore did not like fangs. She loved what was precious, innocent, and sentimental. White found the same stuff mawkish, prudish, and

daffy. "There are too many coy books full of talking animals, whimsical children, and condescending adults," White complained.

Katharine White also hated the word "juvenile," and sorely regretted, in the nineteen-thirties, that "it still adequately describes the calibre of the great majority of these books." But what about her husband's teensy talking mouse-child? True, Stuart was six inches shorter than Nicholas Knickerbocker. Whether he was juvenile remained to be seen, because, for now, he was still stuck in that desk drawer.

In April, 1938, *Life* ran a photo-essay called "The Birth of a Baby," still shots from a film that depicted one woman's pregnancy, labor, and delivery. The film had been banned in New York. Even the photographs proved too much for the American public, and the issue was pulled from newsstands in thirty-three cities. In *The New Yorker*, E. B. White offered a lampoon called "The Birth of an Adult," stills of a film—drawings by Rea Irvin—portraying "the waning phenomenon of adulthood." (Frame 1: "*The Birth of an Adult* is presented with no particular regard for good taste. The editors feel that adults are so rare, no question of taste is involved.") "I have written a fine parody of *Life's* 'The Birth of a Baby,'" White wrote to Thurber, adding, "I also have a children's book about half done." He had, at last, opened the drawer.

That summer, the Whites moved to the tiny town of North Brooklin, Maine. In a November, 1938, essay for *Harper's*, White complained that review copies of children's books, two hundred of them, sent to his wife by publishers, were spilling out of the cupboards, stuck under sofa cushions, tumbling out of the hearth. About the only one he liked was Dr. Seuss's "The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins." The rest were cloying, clunky, and hopelessly naïve. ("One laughs in demoniac glee," he wrote, "but this laugh has a hollow sound.") What E. B. White found most depressing—and he was pretty discouraged in 1938, "this year of infinite terror"—was the looming war that threatened to make the whole planet

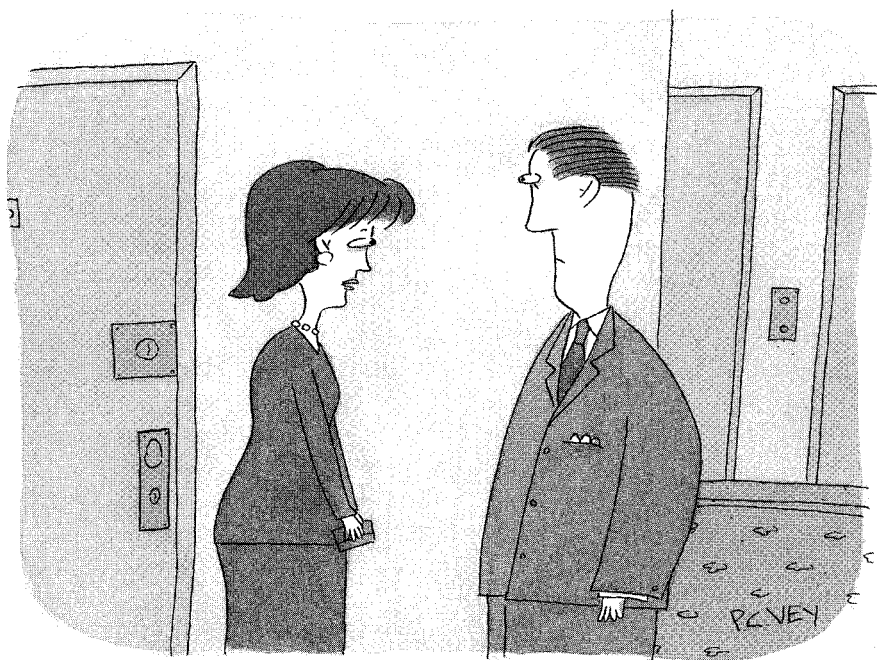
unsuitable for anyone, while, in the world of children's literature, "adults with blueprints of bombproof shelters sticking from their pants pockets solemnly caution their little ones against running downstairs with lollypops in their mouths."

In his *Harper's* essay, White mused, "It must be a lot of fun to write for children—reasonably easy work, perhaps even important work." After Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) pointed White's essay out to Anne Carroll Moore, she sent White a letter. If it's so easy, why don't you do it? "I wish to goodness you would do a real children's book yourself," she wrote. "I feel sure you could, if you would, and I assure you the Library Lions would roar with all their might in its praise." (Moore often inscribed her letters with a return address of "Behind the Lions.") White replied that he had started writing a children's book, but was finding it difficult. "I really only go at it when I am laid up in bed, sick, and lately I have been enjoying fine health. My fears about writing for children are great—one can so easily slip into a cheap sort of whimsy or cuteness. I don't trust myself in this treacherous field unless I am running a degree of fever."

Moore pursued the correspondence. In early 1939, she pressed upon White no fewer than five letters. She sent him copies of her reviews. She gave him

writing tips: "Let it *flow*, without criticizing it *too close* to its *creation*." She inquired after his family, asking, more than once, after his child. She was very, very keen to make the acquaintance of his wife: "I'd like to include Mrs. E. B. White in this letter for two reasons. The first that she is the mother of the boy, or is it a girl? And second because she reviews children's books for *The New Yorker* or some other magazine." She begged him to get back to his children's book. "Can't you achieve a temperature, without getting sick, and finish it off?" She was attempting, as she often did, not only to cultivate this author but to claim him. "No one will be more interested than I when your children's book is ready," she wrote in February. "Let me know if I can be of service at any stage."

In March, White sent an unfinished manuscript to his editor at Harper & Brothers, Eugene Saxton. "It would seem to be for children, but I'm not fussy who reads it," he offered, adding, "You will be shocked and grieved to discover that the principal character in the story has somewhat the attributes and appearance of a mouse." Saxton was far from grieved. He wanted "Stuart Little" for a fall, 1939, publication date. Anne Carroll Moore would have liked that, too, eager as she was to take credit for the book. But that mouse would have to wait for a pack animal



"I had a wonderful time. I just wish you were Oprah giving away cars."

to budge. As White gently warned the pestering librarian, "I pull back like a mule at the slightest goading."

Two books that *were* published in 1939, Gertrude Stein's children's book, "The World Is Round," and John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath," reveal a bit more about what was turning into a baby battle of the books. Anne Carroll Moore applauded Stein's book. Katharine White found it numbingly insipid. (It begins, "Once upon a time the world was round and you could go on it around and around. Everywhere there was somewhere and everywhere there they were men women children dogs cows wild pigs little rabbits cats lizards and animals. That is the way it was.") In her *New Yorker* column, White took aim at Moore: "A number of experts in children's literature have pronounced 'The World Is Round' a good book, but that does not surprise me, since, with a few exceptions, the critics of children's books are remarkably lenient souls. They seem to regard books for children with the same tolerant tenderness with which nearly any adult regards a child. Most of us assume there is something good in every child; the critics go on from this to assume there is something good in every book written for a child. It is not a sound theory."

"The Grapes of Wrath" met with the disapproval not of Anne Carroll Moore but of Annie Dollard, the librarian of a private subscription library in Brooklin. "She was a tiny spinster with firm convictions about which books were fit to read," E. B. White wrote. "The library had acquired 'The Grapes of Wrath,' but Annie took it off the shelf and placed it on her chair and sat on it. That solved that." Of course, that didn't solve that, and Katharine White decided to do something about it, to make the library public, and better. Those two hundred review copies her husband had been tripping over before Christmas? She hauled them to the Brooklin library.

In November of 1939, Katharine White wrote to "Miss Moore," for the first time, delicately hinting that she stop bothering her husband about "Stuart Little"—"I've decided that the less we say the sooner it will be done"—

and steering the correspondence in another direction by seeking advice about how to apply for Carnegie funds for the Brooklin library. She also inquired, a little wickedly, after recommendations from the formidably humorless Moore for material for an anthology she and her husband were compiling, "A Subtreasury of American Humor." Moore, apparently, was unhelpful.

Anne Carroll Moore did not write again to E. B. White until February, 1941, alerting him, in confidence, of her plan to retire: "I am telling you because I would love to make one of my very final recommendations a large order for E. B. White's children's book." White wrote back to say how impressed he and his wife were by her "long and fruitful service to the children of the world," which he considered "one of the great and honorable careers—none finer."

MARY AT THE TATTOO SHOP

She counted her money
before we went in,
avenue beside us anxious
with Friday-evening traffic.
Both fourteen, we shared a Newport,
its manila butt salty to our lips.
Inside, from a huge book
of designs and letter styles,
she chose to get "MARY"
in a black, Old English script
on the back of her neck.
The guy who ran the shop
leaned over her for forty minutes
with a needled gun
that buzzed loud
as if trying to get free.
He took her twenty-five dollars
then another ten
for being under age.
Back outside, the sun
dipped behind rooftops,
about to hand the sky over to night.
Lifting her hazel hair,
she asked me to rub
some A&D ointment
on her new tattoo;
my finger glistened in salve
as I reached for her swollen name.

—Marcus Jackson

Meanwhile, Katharine White had become something of a librarian herself. "Public libraries have more and more seemed to me a democratic necessity," she wrote to Moore in 1942, "so most of my war efforts so far, instead of going into civilian defense proper, have been devoted to keeping alive the little library in this town." What with all her donations of *The New Yorker's* review copies, her little library, now public and incorporated, boasted "the best collection of children's books in the country." The only reason she was still writing her children's literature column, she wrote, probably not entirely in jest, "is to have the books for the Brooklin library."

Katharine White believed passionately in public libraries, and in stocking them with books for children. What worried her was tiny spinsters sitting on books. Making a room for children was

one thing. Guarding the door was entirely another. And then there was the matter of setting traps for mice.

A Subtreasury of American Humor" was published in 1941. As for including humor from children's books, "we gave it up," the Whites admitted; there wasn't any. The next year, E. B. White wrote a wartime pamphlet on freedom of speech. In the winter of 1943-44, the Whites moved back to New York. Katharine began editing Nabokov. Her husband's nerves were shot. He felt as if he had "mice in the subconscious": "The mouse of Thought infests my head, / He knows my cupboard and the crumb." Then, miraculously, over eight weeks in late 1944 and early 1945, he finished the book that he had been writing all his life. Saxton, White's editor, had died in 1943. White sent the manuscript of "Stuart Little" to Ursula Nordstrom, the director of Harper's Department of Books for Boys and Girls; so great was Nordstrom's influence that she sometimes called herself Ursula Carroll Moore. (When the real Moore asked Nordstrom what possibly qualified her to edit children's books, Nordstrom replied, "Well, I am a former child, and I haven't forgotten a thing.")

Anne Carroll Moore had been waiting for "Stuart Little" for seven years, and during that time she had claimed E. B. White, the most celebrated American essayist of the century, as *her* writer. She may have been retired, but her grip on power had scarcely loosened. She still showed up for meetings at the New York Public Library; she still *ran* those meetings, dismaying her successor, Frances Clarke Sayers, who tried switching meeting places, to no avail: "No matter where you held them, she was there." (In an oral history conducted at U.C.L.A. in the nineteen-seventies, Sayers admitted that she found it all but impossible to stand up to Moore, who made her life "an absolute hell" by refusing to cede control: "She hung on to everything.") Moore had come to think of recruiting E. B. White to the world of juvenilia as her final triumph—a victory over Tonsant Weader, a victory over Katharine White. "Stuart Little" was to be Anne Carroll Moore's lasting legacy to children's literature. In her mind, it was her book. There was nothing for it: Nordstrom sent her a galley.

"I never was so disappointed in a book in my life," Moore declared. She summoned Nordstrom to her rooms at the Grosvenor Hotel, where she warned her that the book "mustn't be published." To the Whites she sent a fourteen-page letter, predicting that the book would fail and that it would prove an embarrassment, and begging the author to reconsider its publication. Exactly what the letter said, and even to whom it was addressed, is much disputed. The Whites threw it away—in disgust, Katharine said—and only six pages of an incomplete copy in Moore's hand survive. But even in this expurgated version Moore's criticisms were severe: the story was "out of hand"; Stuart was always "staggering out of scale." Worse, White had blurred reality and fantasy—"The two worlds were all mixed up"—and children wouldn't be able to tell them apart. "She said something about its having been written by a sick mind," E. B. White remembered. Everyone agrees that Moore made a threat and meant to carry it out: "I fear 'Stuart Little' will be very difficult to place in libraries and schools over the country."

"It is unnerving to be told you're bad for children," E. B. White admitted, "but I detected in Miss Moore's letter an assumption that there are rules governing the writing of juvenile literature—rules as inflexible as the rules for lawn tennis. And this I was not sure of." He shrugged it off: "Children can sail easily over the fence that separates reality from make-believe. They go over it like little springboks. A fence that can throw a librarian is as nothing to a child."

White did not write back. His wife did. "K refused to show me her reply," White wrote to his brother, "but I suspect it set a new world's record for poisoned courtesy." It did and it didn't. "I agree with you that schools won't be likely to use 'Stuart Little,'" Katharine wrote to Miss Moore, "but, to be very frank just as you have been, I can't imagine *libraries* not stocking it." And she couldn't help asking, "Didn't you think it even *funny*?"

On October 17, 1945, some fifty thousand copies of "Stuart Little" hit the shelves. The book's pictures, by Garth Williams, share with its story a quiet tenderness, hushed but somehow

breezy, too. (Nordstrom and White had rejected seven other illustrators, whose mice looked too slick, or too much like Mickey.) On the cover, little Stuart, in his shorts and shirtsleeves, paddling his canoe—a boat named Summer Memories—is at once so tiny and so grown up that he could easily have illustrated White's wistful 1941 essay "Once More to the Lake," about going camping with his son at a place in Maine where he had long ago gone with his father, and coming to realize that he wasn't so sure, anymore, just who was who. ("Everywhere we went I had trouble making out which was I, the one walking at my side, the one walking in my pants.")

The most disappointing book Anne Carroll Moore ever read begins with these words:

When Mrs. Frederick C. Little's second son was born, everybody noticed that he was not much bigger than a mouse. The truth of the matter was, the baby looked very much like a mouse in every way. He was only about two inches high; and he had a mouse's sharp nose, a mouse's tail, a mouse's whiskers, and the pleasant, shy manner of a mouse.

Two days after "Stuart Little" was published, an unhappy Harold Ross stopped by White's office at *The New Yorker*. White recalled:

"Saw your book, White," he growled. "You made one serious mistake."

"What was that?" I asked.

"Why, the mouse!" he shouted. "You said he was born. God damn it, White, you should have had him adopted."

Next, Edmund Wilson caught White in the hall. "I read that book of yours," he began. "I found the first page quite amusing, about the mouse, you know. But I was disappointed that you didn't develop the theme more in the manner of Kafka."

White tried to laugh about all this—"the editor who could spot a dubious verb at forty paces, the critic who was saddened because my innocent tale of the quest for beauty failed to carry the overtones of monstrosity"—but then Malcolm Cowley, reviewing the book in the *Times*, proved skeptical, too: "Mr. White has a tendency to write amusing scenes instead of telling a story. To say that 'Stuart Little' is one of the best children's books published this year is very modest praise for a writer of his talent."

The real blow came when Frances Clarke Sayers, presumably acting on

Moore's orders, refused to buy "Stuart Little" for the library, sending a signal to children's librarians across the country: "Not recommended for purchase by expert." In November, a syndicated New York *Post* columnist squibbed, "There will be a to-do about the New York Public Library's reluctance to accept 'Stuart Little.'" For this unsavory gossip, White graciously apologized in a letter to Sayers, assuring her that neither he nor Nordstrom had planted the notice to apply pressure on the library (as, clearly, Sayers suspected), and that he regretted the appearance of "dark and terrible goings on in the world of juvenile letters."

One way to read "Stuart Little" is as an indictment of both the childishness of children's literature and the juvenilization of American culture. Published just a year before Benjamin Spock's "Baby and Child Care," E. B. White's "Stuart Little" might justifiably have been titled "The Birth of an Adult." That or "Is Childbirth Necessary?" The Washington *Post* even ran a review in the form of an affectionate imitation of "Is Sex Necessary?," right down to the idiotic sexologists. ("Lacks verisimilitude from the very first line," said Herr Von Hornswoggle. "Man or mouse, homo sapiens or Mus musculus—no little rodent can sail a ship in Central Park lagoon while still teething. Much, much too Jung.")

Whether Mrs. Frederick C. Little had given birth to a mouse or to a creature that just looked like a mouse was, especially in 1945, poignant social commentary about a culture that refused to look at the facts of life. The one thing Stuart wasn't was a baby. No bottles, no diapers, no nighttime feedings, no prams, no cribs. No baby talk. From the first, Stuart dressed himself and was helpful around the house. The Littles' biggest problem was that mice were so badly treated in children's books. Mr. Little "made Mrs. Little tear from the nursery songbook the page about the 'Three Blind Mice, See How They Run'":

"I don't want Stuart to get a lot of notions in his head," said Mr. Little. "I should feel badly to have my son grow up fearing that a farmer's wife was going to cut off his tail with a carving knife. It is such things that make children dream bad dreams when they go to bed at night."

The Littles also questioned the suitability of "'Twas the night before Christmas," when not a creature stirs, *not even a mouse*. "I think it might embarrass Stuart to hear mice mentioned in such a belittling manner," Mrs. Little told her husband. They settled, at last, on another kind of bowdlerizing:

When Christmas came around, Mrs. Little carefully rubbed out the word mouse from the poem and wrote in the word louse, and Stuart always thought that the poem went this way:

'Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a louse.

Tearing the pages out of books and rubbing out words that might worry their little one—it was just what Katharine White had been complaining about all along. In "Stuart Little," her husband backed her up. And, in her next children's-books column, she, in turn, vindicated him, lamenting the pitiful state of a literature "careful never to approach the child except in a child-like manner. Let us not overstimulate his mind, or scare him, or leave him in doubt, these authors and their books seem to be saying; let us *affirm*."

"Stuart Little" leaves you in doubt, a good deal of doubt, really; it doesn't exactly end so much as it's just, abruptly, over. In Chapter VIII, Stuart falls in love with a bird named Margalo, and when she flies away he goes on a quest. In the book's last chapter, he stops his coupe at a filling station and buys five drops of gas. In a ditch alongside the road, he meets a repairman, preparing to climb a telephone pole. "I wish you fair skies and a tight grip," Stuart says, thoughtfully. "I hope you find that bird," the repairman says. Then come the book's final, distressing lines:

Stuart rose from the ditch, climbed into his car, and started up the road that led toward the north. The sun was just coming up over the hills on his right. As he peered ahead into the great land that stretched before him, the way seemed long. But the sky was bright, and he somehow felt he was headed in the right direction.

Stuart Little isn't Gregor Samsa. He's Don Quixote, turning into Holden Caulfield.

Anne Carroll Moore tried very hard to insure that schools would ban "Stuart Little." Some did. But some schoolteachers decided, instead, to teach the book. In February, 1946, a fifth-

grade class in Glencoe, Illinois, was assigned the task of writing a different ending. One little girl managed, with felicitous economy, to get to a happy ending in just nine paragraphs:

After talking to the repairman, Stuart took the road heading north. "Chug chug" went his car. "Five drops running out," thought Stuart. "I'll stop at that filling station just ahead." So he drove in.

"What do you want?" said the man.

"Five and one-half drops," said Stuart. "The last five drops I got didn't take me as far as I wanted to go." Just then Stuart saw a bird hop out of the filling station.

"This is Margalo," said the man.

"MARGALO!" yelled Stuart.

"You must know each other," said the man.

"I'll make you a deal," said Stuart. "I'll give you a whole ten dollars if you'll let me have your bird."

"It's a deal," said the man.

"Hop in, Margalo," said Stuart and away they went. They were married back in New York and raised a family of half mice and half birds.

That little girl cleared the fence by a good three feet.

And the New York Public Library? Did the mouse scamper past the lions? In late 1945, the library's director, Franklin Hopper, invited Louise Seaman Bechtel, the pioneering editor of children's books at Macmillan, to deliver an endowed lecture on book publishing. Bechtel had discovered that although Sayers had bought a copy of "Stuart Little," she kept it under her desk. At the library, Bechtel, appalled, urged Hopper to read it. He did, and wrote to Bechtel the next day. He liked it very much. He was furious: "Have those who talk about its abnormalities no imagination?" Did Anne Carroll Moore think she could rule his library from the goddam Grosvenor? Hopper ordered Sayers to take Stuart out of his hiding place. "He got into the shelves of the Library all right," E. B. White wrote, "but I think he had to gnaw his way in."

For a while, many American libraries did ban "Stuart Little." But the best librarians, like the best schoolteachers, have a genius all their own. In March, 1946, the seventh graders at the Clifton School, in Cincinnati, Ohio, mailed a letter:

Dear Mr. White:

We have just finished your book "Stuart Little." Our school librarian asked us to read it to help decide whether it would be a good book for the library. We think it would be.

It's a quiet little letter. But that noise, the scritch-scratch of pen across paper, those thirty-eight seventh graders signing their names at the bottom of that letter? That's the sound of a horse falling down.

In January, 1946, when Louise Bechtel delivered her lecture at the New York Public Library, Anne Carroll Moore was sitting in the front row, glaring. Undaunted, Bechtel made a point of plugging "Stuart Little": "I hope it gets all possible awards and medals." Moore made her disapproval known. "E.B.W. will be tickled to hear that A.C.M. sent me a blast," Bechtel wrote to Katharine, afterward. Very likely, he wasn't so tickled. He didn't much like the dark and terrible goings on in the world of juvenile letters.

Moore, in her rage, fallen but still kicking, seems to have used her influence to shut "Stuart Little" out of the Newbery Medal, a prize awarded by a panel of librarians, including, that year, Frances Clarke Sayers. White's book was not even among the four runners-up. The day after the awards were announced, Bechtel was "still grinding my teeth in rage," she wrote to Katharine White, complaining about "these stupid unliterary women in charge."

Harper, meanwhile, headed Moore's criticism off at the pass. "Some people—those who think they understand a thing if they can paste a neat label on it—will call 'Stuart Little' a juvenile," the press's publicity material read. "They will be right. They will also be wrong." In December, 1946, while Katharine White was ushering J. D. Salinger's first *New Yorker* story to press, a story that turned into "The Catcher in the Rye," Nordstrom told E. B. White that there were now a hundred thousand copies of "Stuart Little." White invited his editor to a posh lunch to celebrate. "You can eat 100,000 stalks of celery and I'll swallow 100,000 olives. It will be the E. B. White-Ursula Nordstrom Book and Olive Luncheon." Not exactly happily ever after, but close.

Katharine White wrote her last children's-books column in 1948. Her own children were grown. The Brooklyn library would survive without her review copies. But she was exasperated, too. "No one who has examined five hundred and more juveniles, as I



"And sign here if you'd like to see his organs become more involved in community theatre."

have this year," she wrote wearily, "could say that the American child now occupies a submerged position in an adult world. There can surely be no childish taste, good, bad, or indifferent, that the eager publishers have not tried to satisfy." In those baby-boom years, you couldn't walk a block without bumping into a pram. Did American letters, too, have to make way for babies?

E. B. White published a second children's book, "Charlotte's Web," in 1952. His wife said that he considered it "his only really completely satisfactory children's book," and it was adored, as far as I can tell, by everyone—everyone, that is, except Anne Carroll Moore, who complained that Fern's character was "never developed." Nordstrom, after hearing of Moore's reservations and reading a rave by Eudora Welty in the *Times*, gleefully wrote to White, "Eudora Welty said the book was perfect for anyone over eight or under eighty, and that leaves Miss Moore out as she is a girl of eighty-two."

Anne Carroll Moore died in 1961. "Much as she did for children's books and their illustrators at the start of her career," White wrote to Bechtel, "I can't

help feeling her influence was baleful on the whole. Am I wrong?"

The Central Children's Room at the New York Public Library on Forty-second Street closed in 1970; it reopened at the Donnell Library Center, on Fifty-third, the next year. Next month, the Donnell is closing, to make way for a hotel. Plans have been made for a new children's room to open in a different space at the main library sometime after the building's centennial, in 2011. (This fall, kids' books will circulate from a temporary space on the ground floor.) To augur the return of the Children's Room to Forty-second and Fifth, Christopher Robin Milne's stuffed animals, Pooh, Tigger, Piglet, Eeyore, and Kanga, donated to the library in 1987, have been installed on the third floor.

"Stuart Little" has now sold more than four million copies. In later editions, E. B. White made a tiny change. Mrs. Frederick C. Little's second son is no longer born. He arrives. ♦

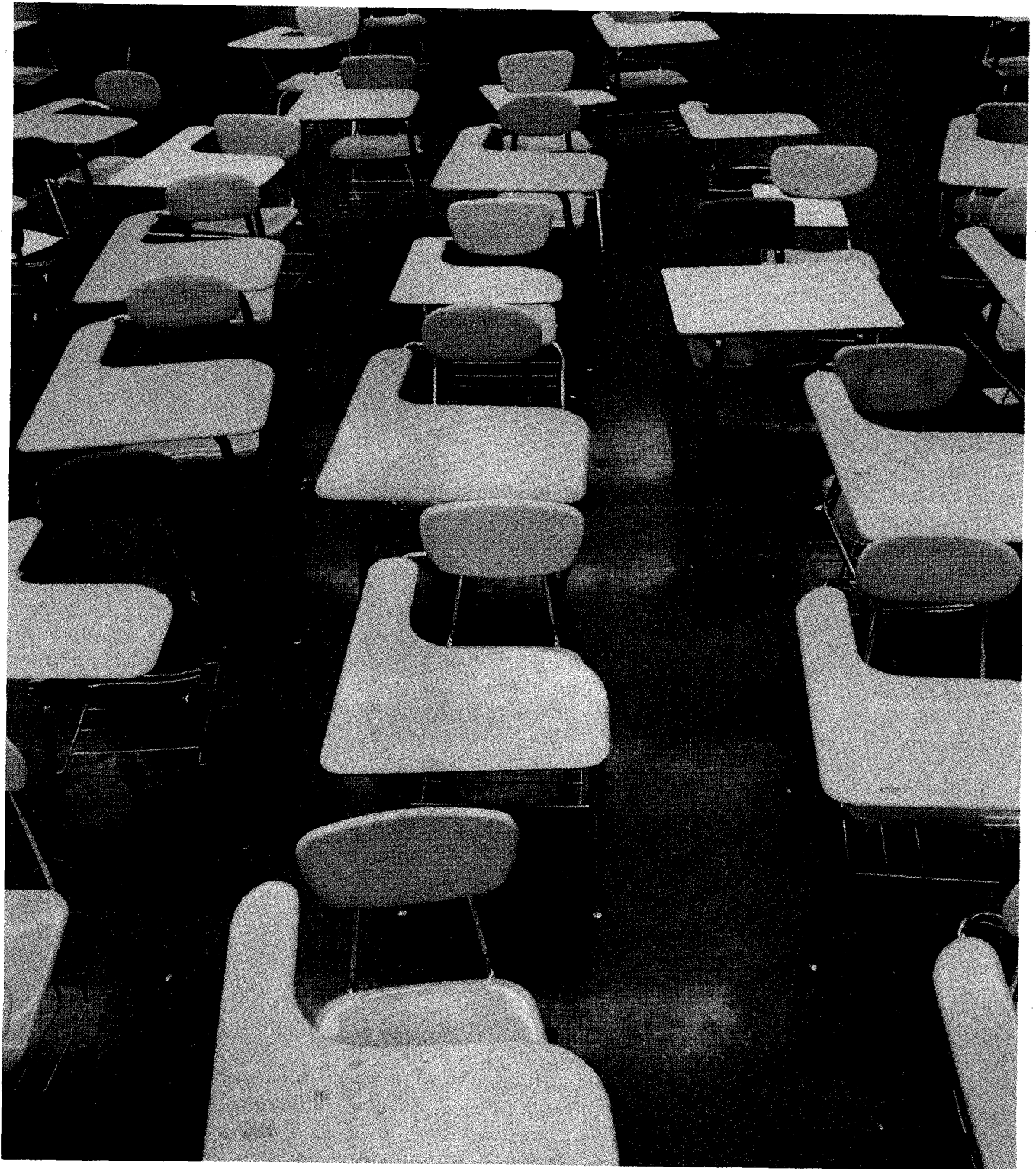
NEWYORKER.COM

A conversation with Jill Lepore and Roger Angell about "Stuart Little."

FICTION

YURT

BY SARAH SHUN-LIEN BYNUM



A year ago, Ms. Duffy, the fifth-grade English and history teacher, had come very close to losing it, what with her homeroom being right next to the construction site for the new computer lab, and her attempts to excise the Aztecs from the curriculum being thwarted, and her ill-advised affair with Mr. Polidori coming to an end. She had come *very* close—or at least that was the general opinion among both the middle- and upper-school faculty, and who was Ms. Hempel to disagree? But now, upon her return, Ms. Duffy looked unrecognizably happy. It was the first week of May, and she was holding court in the teachers' lounge, her hair nearly down to her waist and her big belly protruding over her lap. Above the belly, Ms. Duffy laughed and swayed and gestured freely with her hands, as if to say, "What—this old thing?"

Ms. Hempel couldn't take her eyes off it. It looked as tough as a gourd.

"Yemen is magical," Ms. Duffy was telling the handful of teachers who happened to have fourth period free. "Just unbelievable. The pictures don't capture it at all."

A stack of dun-colored photographs was circulating around the room. After her difficult year, Ms. Duffy had subtlet her apartment and struck out for the ancient world. There had been long and poetic e-mails, reasonably free of gloating—they were full of figs, marketplaces, bare feet against cool tiles, shuttered naps at noon. In between classes, Ms. Hempel had stood in front of the faculty bulletin board and read about Ms. Duffy's naps, trying to detect in these messages a note of melancholy, of homesickness. "Miss you all!!" Ms. Duffy would write in closing, but the absence of a subject, as well as the excessive punctuation, made the sentiment seem less than heartfelt. And then the e-mails had abruptly stopped.

Ms. Hempel studied the photograph that had been passed to her: a blazingly bright and empty street with the tiny figure of Ms. Duffy standing at its center. Who had taken the picture—a Yemenese friend? A Yemenan? It seemed important to know a little more about the person who'd stood in the shade of those massive, intricate buildings and pointed the camera. Perhaps this was the first of many foreign transactions that had resulted, so spectacularly, in Ms. Duffy's new belly.

Ms. Hempel waved the photograph in the air. "Anna, where was this one taken?"

But Ms. Duffy was distracted as more of her former colleagues filtered in to embrace her. "You astound me!" Mrs. Willoughby said, pressing her clasped hands to her lips, a gesture she normally bestowed upon seniors who were making their final appearance in the spring choral concert. Ms. Duffy looked triumphant: her face shone; gone was the faint grimace that had once been her habitual expression. This wasn't like the first week of school, when the teachers turned up in shorts and sundresses and still had their summer tans—Ms. Hempel remembered the shock of seeing Mr. Polidori's brown, hairy calves for the first time. The change in Ms. Duffy seemed permanent, irreversible.

"Have you seen your kids?" Ms. Cruz, the assistant librarian, asked. "They'll go crazy."

"They will freak!" Ms. Mulcahy said. "Suzanne, where's the sixth grade now? Are they at lunch?"

"They're in gym," Ms. Sprague said. "That's all I've heard this year: 'Ms. Duffy, Ms. Duffy.' They can't write their own names without mentioning Ms. Duffy."

"I missed them," Ms. Duffy said, vaguely.

"You won't believe how big they are. Huge. Amy Weyland is wearing a bra now."

From his cubicle, Mr. Meacham moaned, "Must we?"

And Mrs. Willoughby, peering into her coffee, said, "That girl's going to have a great little figure."

"Amy Weyland?" Ms. Duffy echoed.

"Yes! Can you believe it?" Ms. Olin, teacher of sixth-grade French, nearly shouted. She appeared slightly feverish; in fact, everyone did, everyone seemed eager and a little overheated. There was so much to tell: Jonathan Hamish had got suspended; Travis Bent had gone on medication; Mr. Peele had agreed to turn on the air-conditioning early. And, oh—the computer lab was finally done! Ms. Duffy needed to be apprised, and ushered back into the world they all had in common. The merry, frantic din of school rose up around them, louder and louder, as Yemen, fascinating and dusty, drifted farther away.

Ms. Hempel placed the photograph

back on its pile. She would have a chance to find out more, eventually; she and Ms. Duffy were friends, school friends, in the sense that they were both part of the group of younger teachers who liked to gather at a dark Irish bar as soon as the bell rang on Friday afternoons. Ms. Hempel watched as Ms. Duffy was escorted out of the faculty lounge, in search of her former fifth graders.

"Look who's here!" Ms. Olin cried, leading the way.

The whole display was affecting but naïve. Did they all think that Ms. Duffy was back? That once more there would be field trips to Chinatown for soup dumpings, and scavenger hunts in the botanic gardens, and sing-alongs to the Meat Puppets and other college radio stars of the eighties? That the Temple of Dendur would once more be erected in all its cardboard and tempera glory, and the final bittersweet pages of "Tuck Everlasting" read aloud in Ms. Duffy's husky, choked-up voice?

Ms. Hempel knew better. She'd known as soon as she'd seen her: Anna Duffy wasn't ever coming back, not even after her big hard belly had resolved itself into a baby. Most likely, necessity had prompted this visit; she probably needed to empty her locker, or roll over her retirement plan. Didn't the others see? She was no longer one of them; at some point during her year off, she had turned away. Slipped into her civilian clothes and disappeared. And if she was back now, it was only to say goodbye.

Mooney's, the Irish bar, was just a few blocks away from the school. Beautiful Ms. Cruz, who really did lead the fabled double life of the librarian, had discovered it one night while careering through town with a free-jazz drummer nearly twice her age. It had been their last stop. What must Ms. Cruz have thought when they finally left the place, an hour before dawn, and she realized, looking up and down the avenue for a taxi, that she was just around the corner from her desk, her rubber stamps, her little stack of overdue notices? Maybe she thought, How perfect. To feel one's real life rub up so closely, so carelessly, against one's school life—there was no greater enchantment. Or so Ms. Hempel supposed, never having put enough distance between the two to experience it herself. She liked to hear

Ms. Cruz talk, in her calm and self-effacing way, about all the old musicians she had fallen for, the hard-drinking drummer included. Ms. Cruz had taken him home with her that night, and the next Friday she had brought the teachers to Mooney's.

The narrow space was illuminated by strings of colored Christmas lights and a glowing clock. A jukebox stood in the back, in between the cavellike entrances to two unisex bathrooms. Battered black tables, high unsteady stools, linoleum floor. The floor was wonderful to dance on. It made Ms. Hempel feel graceful and coordinated, even before she started drinking. All the teachers loved to dance on Friday afternoons. The sticky blinds on Mooney's windows were always pulled shut, so it was easy to forget that it was only four o'clock and the sun was still shining outside. They danced as if it were the middle of the night. They did the hustle. They did the electric slide. They did silly moves they remembered from high school, and they looked good doing them. When Mr. Radovich tried to dance as if he were black, no one minded. They were too happy feeding quarters into the jukebox, shimmying back to the bar. As she bumped hips with Ms. Cruz and sashayed toward the bathrooms, Ms. Hempel realized that an awful mistake had been made: she had actually been meant to spend her whole life dancing, not teaching English to the seventh grade.

For someone who had an abundance of freckles and almost always wore clogs, Ms. Duffy could dance astonishingly well. She tossed back her hair and half closed her eyes and lifted her chin ever so slightly, as if a handsome invisible person were tilting her face up to kiss her. And then she stepped from side to side, with a barely discernible motion in her hips, her spine long and straight, her shoulders faintly twitching. It was the simplest dance in the world, and also the most beguiling, somehow. Other dancers drew close to her, unconsciously. She could often be found in the middle of a spontaneous dance sandwich. One afternoon, Mr. Polidori had sprung from his barstool, cracked his knuckles, and slid across the linoleum floor on his knees, arriving breathlessly at her neatly shuffling feet.

Ms. Hempel liked to think that this was the moment that their romance had begun. Of course, she could be wrong;

Mr. Polidori performed sudden extravagant gestures all the time—kissing your hand in gratitude, wrapping his fingers around your neck and gently throttling you, draping his arm across your shoulders with comradely affection—gestures that thrilled Ms. Hempel whenever she happened, through luck and proximity, to be the recipient of them. Her skin on fire, she felt how ridiculous it was to be thrilled: you could not, as a rule, take Mr. Polidori seriously. And, that afternoon on the dance floor, Ms. Duffy did not appear to do so. When he came gliding toward her, his arms outspread, she merely offered him her hand and hoisted him up, never once losing the beat of her winsome little dance. But what if, as their hands joined, a secret message had been exchanged? A message that had taken them both by surprise? Ms. Hempel sometimes thought of this moment now, as she tried to piece together a story of what had happened. How interesting it would have been to witness the very inception of an affair! She could have hoarded up the image—him on his knees, her swaying above him—to share with Amit when he came home. Often, walking dreamily home from the bar, the afternoon light slanting across the pavement, Ms. Hempel found herself full of marvellous observations and stories to relate to him. But then she went inside and it got dark; she turned up the television and felt a headache coming on, and by the time Amit returned from the lab she couldn't think of anything to say, even when he wrinkled his nose and asked mildly, "How come you smell like cigarettes?"

Ms. Hempel wondered about the father of Ms. Duffy's baby. A sloe-eyed camel driver, singing under his breath? A poet studying English at the university, or maybe a young doctor who had led her through a bazaar? She spent much of the day's final period considering the possibilities. And if in her speculations she caught a whiff of something faintly rotten and imperial she ignored it. Of all the wonderful novels E. M. Forster had written, "A Passage to India" was her favorite. It made her wonder, were there any caves in Yemen? Caves that Ms. Duffy could have wandered into to explore, and then stumbled out of, dazed and transformed?

At the entrance to the library, Ms. Cruz sat behind her enormous wrap-around desk. It resembled a sort of cockpit, its high sides studded with librarian paraphernalia, Ms. Cruz wheeling expertly about the interior in her ergonomic chair. The desk had two levels: the lower level was intended solely for the librarian's use, while the upper level was used by anyone who wanted to stand around bothering the librarian, as Mrs. Willoughby was doing now.

"Did you see?" Mrs. Willoughby turned to Ms. Hempel with excitement. Then she remembered. "Oh, yes, you were there. Isn't she gorgeous?"

Ms. Hempel said, "Gorgeous. And very—" She extended her arms.

"I know, I know! Not what we expected. I thought she'd come back with a slide show and some nice scarves. But no! So much more."

She leaned toward Ms. Cruz, resuming: "Thirty-five miles from the nearest hospital. Isn't that madness?"

"There's a midwife. She'll be fine."

"Of course she will be. But still. Out in the middle of nowhere? With your first child? You have no idea."

"She was tired of living here. She said so all the time."

"You girls don't know what it's like. You get so lonely at the beginning. You're tired, your nipples hurt, you can't remember what day it is."

"Roman will be there. And they're building a second yurt," Ms. Cruz said firmly, and then glanced up at Ms. Hempel. "Anna is moving upstate," she explained.

But that explained nothing. "A yurt?" Ms. Hempel asked. "Is that something . . . Yemenese?" She blushed.

"Mongolian," Mrs. Willoughby said. "I had to ask, too. Not everybody who teaches here is a walking encyclopedia. It's a big circular tent made out of animal skins. Or, in Anna's case, some fancy state-of-the-art flame-retardant fabric." Mrs. Willoughby conjured up a miniature yurt with her hands in the air. "Not like a tepee—more like a circus tent. Made out of yaks."

"But the father," Ms. Hempel asked. "Is he from Yemen?"

Mrs. Willoughby looked at her peculiarly. "Heavens, no."

For the trip abroad had been cut short. Something in the food had made

Ms. Duffy sick, dangerously so. Only two months out of the country and she was doubled over, shitting water. This explained the end of the lyrical e-mails. Ms. Duffy had lost nearly twenty pounds by the time she'd crept onto the airplane and come home to convalesce at her mother's; it was there that, looking pale and otherworldly, she had met Roman. A kite artist.

"He was visiting his mother, too," Ms. Cruz said.

"They're neighbors in the condo complex, the one her mother moved to after the divorce," Mrs. Willoughby said. "Anna claims that it's soulless and horrible. But maybe she feels different now."

"Wow," Ms. Hempel said, collecting herself. So the father of Ms. Duffy's baby was an American, whom she'd met in the courtyard of an ugly condominium.

"Being a kite artist—that's his job?" she heard herself asking.

Ms. Cruz nodded. "He's a master. You can find him on the Internet."

"He spends all day making kites?"

"And flying them."

"How wonderful," Ms. Hempel said uncertainly. "I'd like to do that."

"Oh, wouldn't we all?" Mrs. Willoughby said, and took a great breath, and for a precarious moment it looked as if she might sing the chorus of "Let's Go Fly a Kite." But the opportunity passed. "There's family money, too, of course. And a big piece of land passed down through the ages. Anna is living on an estate! In a yurt, admittedly, but still. Pretty grand. Isn't this what they call marrying up?"

"She got married?" Ms. Hempel asked, startled. She hadn't seen a ring.

A delicate look passed between the two other women. Ms. Hempel caught it, and felt her skin prickle.

"It happened very quickly," Ms. Cruz said.

"As it so often does," Mrs. Willoughby added. "One minute you're all alone, and the next—boom!—you're standing there in City Hall with the man of your dreams."

"And moving upstate," Ms. Hempel said. "And having a baby."

"Exactly," Mrs. Willoughby said, with a slap of her hands on the top of Ms. Cruz's desk. "That's the trick of life—how much everything can change."

And then, squeezing Ms. Hempel's arm, she asked, "Remember? Anna was miserable."

But Ms. Hempel wouldn't have described her as miserable, and she doubted that Ms. Duffy would have used the word herself. Because didn't misery imply a wallowing sort of wretchedness? And a teacher had no time for that. The curriculum was always marching on, relentlessly: the ancient Egyptians melting into the ancient Greeks, the blur of check marks and smiley faces, the hot rattling breath of the photocopier, book reports corrected shakily on the bus, the eternal night of parent-teacher conferences, dizzy countdowns to every holiday, and the dumb animal pleasure of rest. One could be quite unhappy and never have a chance to know it. Ms. Hempel was sometimes astonished by the thoughts she'd have while walking to work. One morning, she looked longingly at a patch of ice on the pavement and realized that if she were to fall and fracture her leg in several places then she wouldn't have to go to school. And maybe, if the doctors put her in traction, a substitute would be hired for the rest of the year. Perhaps she'd need a body cast. There was a way out, an honorable and dignified way out. All she had to do was undergo a terrible accident . . .

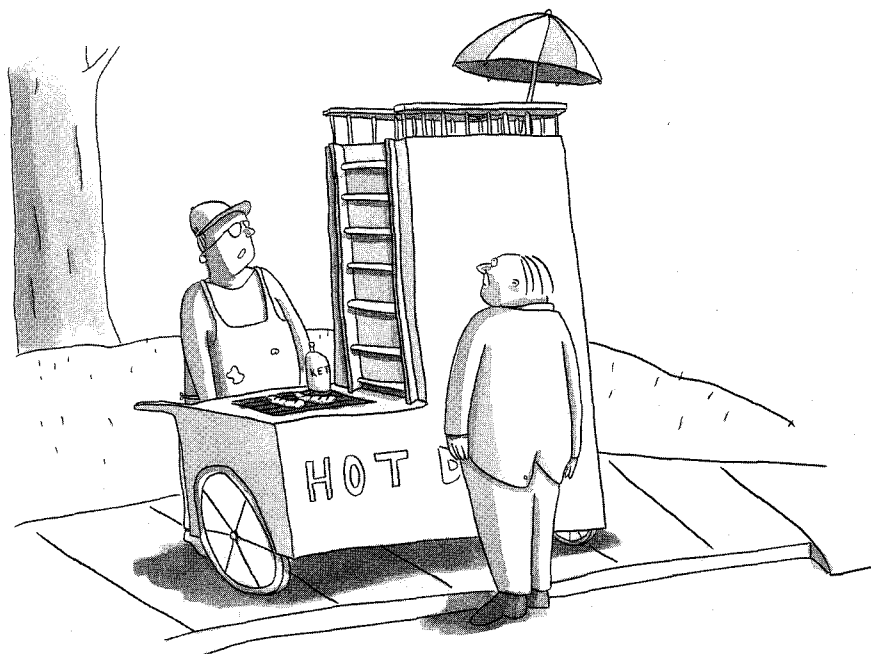
But then her desk would be emp-

tied in her absence, and all her secrets would come scuttling forth: the torn and smelly pair of stockings, abandoned there months ago; the descriptive paragraphs that had taken her so long to grade she'd finally claimed to have lost them at the laundromat; the open bag of Doritos. And, embarrassment aside, she had responsibilities: The volleyball finals were fast approaching—who would keep score? Someone else would have to chair the weekly meetings of the girls' after-school book group, and conduct the middle-school assembly on Diversity Day. And who would finish grading the "Mockingbird" essays, adhering to the byzantine rubric she'd devised?

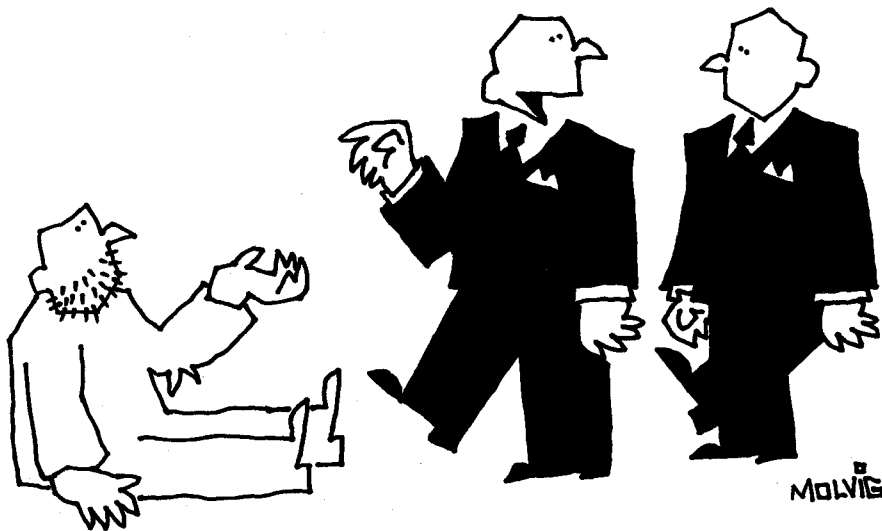
The fact was that no one could.

"Call in sick," Amit would say sleepily, his arm flung over her. "Tell them you caught a cold." He'd kiss her. "You're infected. And extremely contagious. You need to stay in bed, O.K.?" But she would already be staggering toward the shower.

Had Ms. Duffy ever thought about slipping on the ice? Probably not; her thoughts likely took a more enraged and practical turn. Probably, as she waited for the bus, she drafted letters of resignation in her head, letters that described in withering detail the incompetence of the new middle-school director, or the shabby state of the women's second-floor bathroom. Ms. Duffy was so thoroughly good



"That's my studio. You know, where I work on the hot dogs."



"I read something about this in the 'Times.'"

at complaining. She'd begin dryly enough, with a sigh and a little self-mocking smile, but soon the full force of her indignation would take over, and her complaints would build in hilarity until she was magnificent to behold—her whole body radiant with fury. Often her stories ended with poor Mr. Mumford, the head of the middle school, saying, "Now, Anna, *just calm down*"—a phrase that, even when recollected in the yeasty tranquillity of Mooney's, made Ms. Duffy utter a murderous, strangled scream.

"Aaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrr!"

From the end of the bar, Mr. Polidori would raise his glass to her. The gesture was perfectly in character: joking, wry, yet also somehow gallant. He would then return his attention to Mimi Gertz, the person whose company he appeared to enjoy more than anyone else's. She ran the art department, and made sculptures out of giant nails. She was fifteen years his senior and went on long bike trips with her girlfriend. Yet he, a teacher of physics, seemed always full of things to say to her. A mystery. But no more a mystery than his affair with Anna Duffy.

Affairs. Flings. Apparently they happened all the time, and between the people you'd least expect.

"You didn't know about me and Phil?" Ms. Cruz asked, leaning forward in her ergonomic chair. Phil Macrae taught life science to the sixth grade. Beardless and cowlicked, he looked as if he himself had

only recently completed the sixth grade. Ms. Cruz had also had sex with Mr. Rahimi, the computer teacher, and Jim, who ran the after-school program.

"It got a little weird," she said.

Things had also got weird, Ms. Cruz revealed, for Mrs. Bell and Mr. Blanco—so weird, in fact, that he had had to go teach at another school for a few years, until the conflagration finally died out.

"Julia?" Ms. Hempel cried in dismay. She loved Julia Bell, who taught both remedial and advanced math.

"This was ages ago. Long before you came to us," Mrs. Willoughby said.

"But Daniel?" Ms. Hempel cried. "I thought he was gay."

"Oh, no. No. What ever gave you that idea? He's just Spanish."

And, incredibly, the former lover of Mrs. Bell. With his pointed goatee and his funny little vests? It was very hard to picture. Perhaps in a younger version his ambiguous sexuality had actually been quite dashing. Even irresistible. So much so that Julia Bell—a teacher blessed with pluck and humor and sense—had risked everything to be with him.

"This was before the boys were born?" Ms. Hempel asked.

"Wally was two, I think, and not yet in school. But Nathan had already started kindergarten." Mrs. Willoughby raised her eyebrows. "It could have been a real mess."

Unthinkable, Julia making a mess. Which was exactly why Ms. Hempel

adored her: the serene, amused, and capable air; the way she kept an easy sense of order among even the most fractious children; the affection that her sons heaped upon her, tackling her in the middle of the hallway. She also had a plume of pure-white hair growing from her right temple—she was the Susan Sontag of eighth-grade algebra. Her husband taught math, too, at the state university; they had fallen in love during graduate school. And all this—her world of boys and equations and good cheer—had been hazarded.

And then recovered.

Now she could sit in faculty meetings with Daniel Blanco and not show the slightest sign that he was in any way special. If it weren't for the older teachers like Mrs. Willoughby, who remembered, there would be no trace left of the perilous affair. Ms. Hempel couldn't decide which amazed her more: the sight of Mrs. Bell and Mr. Blanco talking amiably by the coffee urn or the thought of them locked in an urgent, hopeless embrace.

Leaving the library, Ms. Hempel was surprised to find Ms. Duffy standing alone in the vestibule, her hands resting lightly atop her belly. She seemed to have lost her entourage somewhere along the way. She was looking at the enormous bulletin boards that lined the walls and displayed the latest projects generated by the younger grades. Only a year ago, she had been responsible for filling such a board, a task which required judiciousness (for not every child's hieroglyph could be hung) and a protracted struggle with crêpe paper and a staple gun. But now she was free of that. She gazed at the art work with the cool eye of an outsider.

"Beatrice," Ms. Duffy said, and Ms. Hempel gave her a hug. "Have you seen this?" She pointed to the fifth-grade bulletin board. "The projects are overlapping. You can't read them. And he put a staple right through that kid's name."

He being Mr. Chapman, Wall Street trader turned teacher, called in to replace Ms. Duffy for the year, and now, it seemed, quite possibly for good.

"How are we supposed to know who drew the Minotaur?" she asked. "A child spent hours—hours!—working on this, and you can't even read his name."

"The name is kind of obscured," Ms. Hempel agreed, peering at the display.

"My God," Ms. Duffy muttered. "This isn't rocket science." She reached up and pinched the staple between her thumb and forefinger. With a worrying motion, she extracted it, and then flicked it to the ground like a cigarette butt.

The child's name was Lucien Nguyen.

"Much better," Ms. Hempel said, and smiled. She wanted to leave, her curiosity dulled now that she knew Ms. Duffy wasn't harboring a little half-Yemenese baby. But Ms. Hempel's tendency to suggest precisely the opposite of what she actually wished, in the vague and automatic hope of pleasing someone, asserted itself.

"Do you want to walk to Izzy's and get a bubble tea? My treat?"

For a moment, it looked as if Ms. Duffy were going to agree. But just as she was turning away from the displays she inhaled sharply and wheeled back around.

Her finger landed on a piece of pink paper, then circled a single word. "Did you see this?"

The text was printed in a computer's version of girlish handwriting: "Persephone picked up the pomegranate and ate four of its' seeds." Ms. Hempel winced.

"Oooph. Not good."

"They're kids," Ms. Duffy said. "They make mistakes. But how are they going to know that they've made mistakes if their teacher hangs them up on the fucking wall? I mean, does he make them do drafts? Does he correct anything?"

Ms. Hempel shrugged weakly. Her own alertness to error had wavered over the years. But maybe all it took was some time away, some time abroad, for one's acuity to be restored, because now, simply standing beside Ms. Duffy, she could feel her powers beginning to return—the mistakes were leaping out at her, the bulletin board lighting up with offenses.

"Upper right-hand corner," she told Ms. Duffy. "Completely random capitalization. Since when is 'swan' a proper noun? Or 'rape,' for that matter?" Though, she had to admit, both choices had their own logic.

She also spotted "Aries" for "Ares," "alter" in the place of "altar," and, there it was again, that old devil "its'." The real wonder of it all was how these mistakes managed to survive spell-check. You had

to kind of love them for it, for being indestructible.

Ms. Duffy was pulling Persephone off the wall. "Where's Leda?" she demanded. There was now a naked, pockmarked hole on the board.

"Up there," Ms. Hempel said, a little reluctantly.

Ms. Duffy rose up onto the very tips of her clogs, like a ballerina in toe shoes. Her belly didn't seem to throw off her balance. Up, up, her puffy fingers reached, quivering with purpose. "Got it," she gasped. Down came Leda. Down, too, came Hera and the peacock, Echo and a weedy-looking Narcissus, Danaë dripping wet in her shower of gold. Down came the Minotaur and Medusa, Hermes, Neptune, Athena leaping bloodily from her father's splitting head. "Neptune? Wasn't that the name the Romans used?"

"Exactly," Ms. Duffy said.

Ms. Hempel gazed at the pillaged display, felt afraid, and looked down the hallway, in the direction of help. She wondered briefly why she, of all the young teachers who drank too much at Mooney's, had been chosen by Ms. Duffy to share this particular mission. Perhaps it was simply chance. The end of the day, an empty vestibule, a surge of nameless emotion—and then someone emerges, making you not alone anymore. So it had happened, a year ago, with Mr. Polidori. "Out of the blue?" Ms. Hempel had asked Ms. Duffy at the time. "The two of you just—?" She could not believe it then, but now, holding the plundered goods against her chest, it made a sort of sense to her. It was easy to find oneself, without warning or prelude, embroiled. She crouched down and tapped the papers against the floor, neatening the pile, making a crisp little sound, wanting above all to avoid the appearance of untowardness, wanting the whole operation to feel as tidy, as considered as possible.

They agreed, finally, that the best thing would be to return the projects, with a carefully worded note attached, to Mr. Chapman's classroom. "My room" was how Ms. Duffy referred to it, and then she alarmed Ms. Hempel by asking, "You're going to sign it, too?" No, she was not, but she didn't have the heart to say so yet, especially now that Ms. Duffy had been seized by some fresh distress. As the fluorescent lights flickered on

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in the classroom, she looked about her wildly. Things were not as she had left them.

The purple beanbags were still in the reading corner, and the jade plants were thriving, having been faithfully watered by Ms. Cruz. The record-player was there, too, although it was buried under stacks of handouts, and the Calder mobile still dangled from the ceiling. But the Indonesian shadow puppets were gone, and so were the poems.

"He took down my poems?" Ms. Duffy's voice was small. She had gone to great lengths to procure them, even risking arrest. A few years earlier, the poems had begun appearing on subways and buses, alongside the advertisements for credit repair and dermatologists. As soon as a new poem was posted, Ms. Duffy would devise a plan for obtaining it: scouting out empty subway cars, climbing up onto the scarred seats, easing the poem from its curved plastic sheath, secreting it away beneath her long winter coat. All for the sake of her fifth graders! Every day they could gaze up and contemplate the words. Or not, and therein lay the beauty of osmosis. They passed the year in the company of Whitman and Dickinson, Mark Strand and May Swenson; some of the poetry would penetrate even the most obdurate souls.

Which was probably the thinking of the transit authority as well—but the fact that her fifth grade's edification came at the expense of the citizenry did not seem to give Ms. Duffy pause. And then it became possible to acquire the poems lawfully, by sending off a simple request on school letterhead—but Ms. Duffy, like all the best teachers, had a renegade spirit, and continued to haunt the buses late at night.

Now, in the place of her stolen poems, hung boldly colored posters urging the class to READ! And pointing out that Reading Is Fun! That people everywhere should Celebrate Reading! Additionally, there was a poster commemorating a Super Bowl win of the Green Bay Packers. All of which, it was obvious, had been obtained through official channels.

Ms. Duffy sank down onto one of the many little tables arranged throughout the room. The fifth graders didn't yet know the isolation of desk-chairs; they still worked companionably at these low shiny tables. She covered her face

with her hands and sighed, her elbows digging into the high mound of her stomach.

"I hope he put them somewhere safe," she said.

"You want me to send them to you?" Ms. Hempel asked.

"No, there's no room. I just meant in case he changes his mind."

She glanced over at what had once been her desk, at the piles she was no longer accountable for.

"He has them doing those dumb workbooks?" she asked, but all her earlier outrage was now exhausted.

"It's his first year," Ms. Hempel said, and laid the ransacked myths on Mr. Chapman's desk. "He should take whatever shortcuts he can find."

Ms. Duffy didn't answer. She was still looking around the classroom, at the small ways in which it was now strange, at the names taped onto the backs of the chairs, names she would not recognize.

She said, "I lost Theo McKibben at the Metropolitan Museum. My first year."

"Theo?" Ms. Hempel laughed. "That's easy to do."

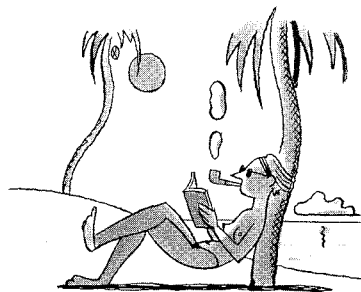
"It was a nightmare. My first waking nightmare."

"The first of many," Ms. Hempel said. "But just think: you'll never have to go on a field trip again."

Ms. Duffy smiled slightly. "Never again."

And then Ms. Hempel realized, with a sick feeling, that she had forgotten to distribute the permission slips for next week's outing to the planetarium. Only three days left—not a problem for the organized students, but it didn't allow much leeway for the children you always had to hound. She would have to resort to an incentive plan. Early dismissal? Ice cream?

She paced around the desk, mindlessly, and saw it as both hopeful and doomed: the careful stacks beginning to slip; colored pens littered everywhere;



memos from Mr. Mumford protruding at odd angles; the plastic in-box taken over by trading cards, half-eaten candy bars, extra-credit assignments on the verge of being lost.

"You're brilliant." She turned to Ms. Duffy. "You are. Because we can't leave to make more money—that's despicable. And we can't leave to do something easier, some nice quiet job in an office—that would be embarrassing! Am I supposed to tell my kids, 'O.K., I'm off to answer phones at an insurance company'? It's impossible. So what can we do? We can—" Ms. Hempel gestured helplessly at Ms. Duffy's belly. "Why didn't I think of that?"

She had imagined a body cast instead.

Again, Ms. Duffy gave her a thin smile. It wasn't clear whether she took Ms. Hempel's compliment as such.

"So what's stopping you?" she asked idly. She plucked a long, loose hair from the sleeve of her blouse and dropped it onto Mr. Chapman's floor. Then she seemed suddenly to remember that she was pregnant, and undergoing a remarkable experience. She lit up. "You should do it!" she said with abrupt conviction. "You'll love it. You will." She pushed herself off the little table and began moving toward Ms. Hempel. "We think we have all the time in the world, but in reality we don't. And when you've found the right person you just have to go for it. There's never a good time—it's never convenient. Don't fool yourself into waiting for the perfect moment—"

She stopped. Her hands flew up to her mouth. "I'm so sorry!"

Ms. Hempel touched the fair, freckled arm. "Oh, don't worry. Please, really, don't worry."

"I'm an idiot!" Ms. Duffy cried.

"You're not," Ms. Hempel said. "Because I forget, too. After I do the dishes, I get this panicked feeling that I've put my ring down somewhere and now I can't find it." She lifted her bare hand and looked at it. "Everything was friendly, it really was."

Ms. Duffy nodded, her face stricken.

"Amit and I still talk on the phone. And last week he sent me a book." She didn't mention that it was actually one of her books, a book that he had taken with him by mistake. "We're in very good touch," she said.

Ms. Duffy was unconsolated. "What happened?" she murmured. "What made you decide—"

It was hard to keep straight—they had told people different things at different times. There was Amir's fellowship in Texas, which he couldn't turn down; and there was the difficulty of finding time to plan a wedding, not to mention the expense; there was their youth, of course, and the uncertainty that comes with it, the fearful cloudiness of the future (and what a mercy that was, to be considered, at nearly thirty, still hopelessly young). All of which was true, just as all of it was prevarication, and even in the midst of saying these things she was never sure exactly whose feelings were being spared, who was being protected. For whose sake was all this delicacy required? She hated to think that it might be hers.

"It wasn't the teaching, was it?" Ms. Duffy asked.

Oh, no, it wasn't that. At least she didn't think so. But funny how everyone had a theory of her own. "It's not your father, is it?" her mother had asked. Her father had been dead for two years now, but at times she still found herself ambushed by his absence.

She had told her mother no, it wasn't because she missed her father. And she had told Mr. Polidori no, it wasn't because of him, either. She was surprised that he'd even asked. It had been a startling glimpse of vanity, of self-importance. He had cornered her by the jukebox and gazed down at her earnestly—the earnestness itself a surprise.

They had only kissed!

And nuzzled, with some breathless pressing and hugging, in the bathroom at Mooney's. Ages ago, on one of those happy Friday afternoons. After he had ended things with Ms. Duffy but before he had fallen for the gamine younger half sister of Mimi Gertz. A pause between acts, there in the dark stall at Mooney's, everyone giddy with the rapid approach of summer. She had tumbled into the bathroom and found him, back to the door, penis presumably in hand, and before she could even gasp he had glanced over his shoulder, told her to wait, and then unhurriedly finished, washed his hands, and dried them with a sheet from a roll of gray paper towels, asking her, "Do you hate this song as much as I do?" They had danced, barely able to

move. He had lowered the swinging latch into the little round hook by the door.

"Forgot to do that," he'd said, and she'd laughed.

Or had she? She would like to think that she had, that she had kept her wits about her and laughed, kept things floating along lightly, the encounter accidental and jolly. She would like to think that she hadn't swooned. Hadn't shut her eyes and given way, tipped her head and held on. There had been no hesitation—only treachery, only readiness—a perfect swan dive into the dark pool of flings and affairs. Maybe she had let out a little moan. But then the song had come to an end, and he had clasped her bearishly, pecked her on the forehead, and said, "I bet you make all the boys crazy, Ms. Hempel." And, after releasing the latch, he had gallantly held the door open for her.

She'd walked obediently back to her seat at the bar, wondering, What just happened?

Later, she would return to this moment, flipping it back and forth like a tricky flash card, one that somehow refused to be memorized. She had asked herself all the boring questions (not pretty enough? odd smell? fiancé?), but couldn't quite manage an answer. Causality kept escaping her. He had kissed her, then he had changed his mind—that was as far as she ever got. But always fascinating to her was the fact that she had felt him changing his mind. Felt it in her muscles and on her skin. Not that he had done anything as obvious as stiffen, and his body hadn't once let go of hers, yet something had shifted—the pressure that was once excited now merely emphatic, the mouth still warm but only reassuringly so, the embrace turning into a squeeze. His body's gracious withdrawal of interest in the very moment that he decided, No, this really isn't for me.

And though many things would reveal themselves in time—the sex of Ms. Duffy's baby, a girl; and her name, Pina, after the bleak choreographer; the name of the woman who worked at Amir's lab, which was Lilly; the right word, the word she'd been looking for, *Yemeni*—still she returned to the bathroom at Mooney's, to its perfect mystery, to the moment when Mr. Polidori had wrapped his arms around her like a bear. That moment in which someone had made a decision. She wanted to remember how it felt. ♦

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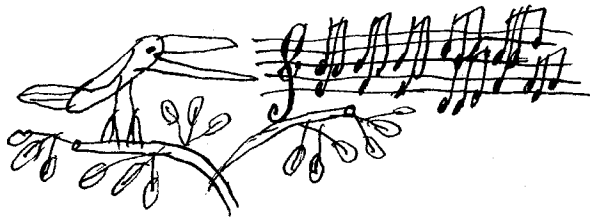
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THE CRITICS



BOOKS

TURF WAR

Americans can't live without their lawns—but how long can they live with them?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

In 1841, Andrew Jackson Downing published the first landscape-gardening book aimed at an American audience. At the time, Downing was twenty-five years old and living in Newburgh, New York. He owned a nursery, which he had inherited from his father, and for several years had been publishing loftily titled articles, such as “Remarks on the Duration of the Improved Varieties of New York Fruit Trees,” in horticultural magazines. Downing was dismayed by what he saw as the general slovenliness of rural America, where pigs and poultry were allowed to roam free, “bare and bald” houses were thrown up, and trees were planted haphazardly, if at all. (The first practice, he complained, contributed to the generally “brutal aspect of the streets.”) His “Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening” urged readers to improve themselves by improving their front yards. “In the landscape garden we appeal to that sense of the Beautiful and the Perfect, which is one of the highest attributes of our nature,” it declared.

Downing’s practical ideas about how to achieve the Beautiful included grouping trees in clusters, importing shrubbery of “the finest foreign sorts,” and mixing forms and colors with enough variety to “keep alive the interest of a spectator, and awaken further curiosity.” Essential to any Perfect garden, he held, was an expanse of “grass

mown into a softness like velvet.” As an example of what he had in mind, Downing pointed to the Livingston estate, near Hudson, New York. (Privately, in a letter to a friend, he noted that maintaining the grounds of the Livingston estate required the labors of ten men.) “No expenditure in ornamental gardening is, to our mind, productive of so much beauty as that incurred in producing a well kept lawn,” he wrote.

By almost any measure, the “Treatise” was a success. It went through eight editions and sixteen printings, and it made Downing famous. One critic called him the “Sir Joshua Reynolds of our rural decorations.” The “Treatise,” another proclaimed, had ushered in a “new epoch in the annals both of our literature and our social history.” In 1851, Downing was invited by President Millard Fillmore to design improvements to the grounds around the Capitol. Before the project could be completed, however, Downing died in a steamboat accident on the Hudson; he was just thirty-six.

Downing’s practice was taken over by his protégé, Calvert Vaux, whom he had brought over from London as an assistant. (Vaux named his first son Downing.) Later, Vaux joined up with Frederick Law Olmsted, whose career Downing had also encouraged. The two men embraced many of Downing’s ideas. They designed Central Park, with

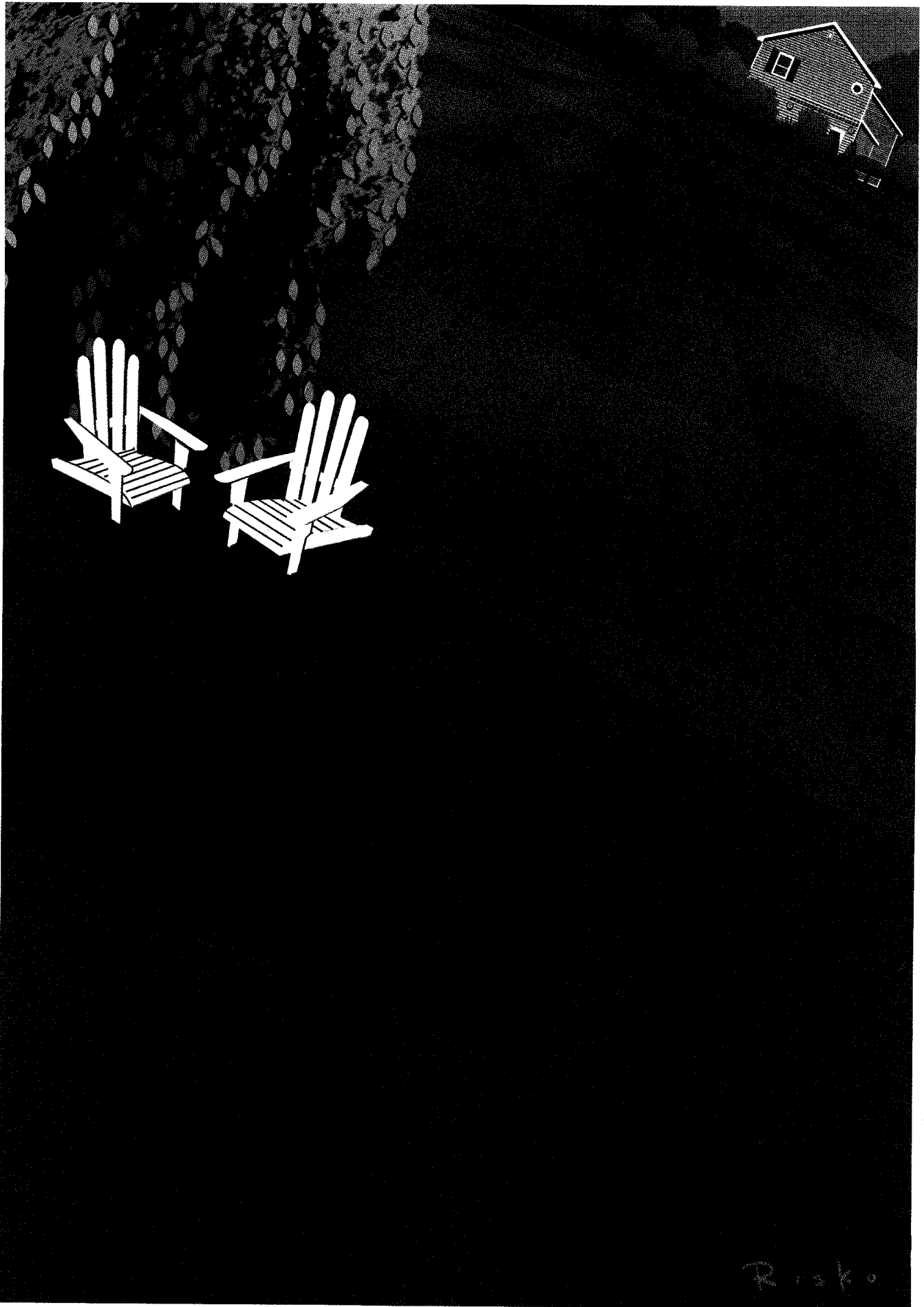
its broad lawns, and laid out suburbs like Riverside, Illinois, and Sudbrook Park, Maryland, with their many lesser lawns. Olmsted and Vaux’s work, in turn, influenced countless suburban subdivisions. The design for Levittown little resembled the Livingston estate, except for the grassy plot surrounding every Cape Cod. “No single feature of a suburban residential community contributes as much to the charm and beauty of the individual home and the locality as well-kept lawns,” Abraham Levitt once observed.

Having migrated into many parts of the United States that did not yet belong to the United States when the “Treatise” was published, the lawn today is nearly ubiquitous. Its spread has given rise to an entire industry, or, really, complex of industries—Americans spend an estimated forty billion dollars each year on grass—and to the academic discipline of turf management, degrees in which can now be obtained from, among other schools, the University of Massachusetts and Ohio State. The lawn has become so much a part of the suburban landscape that it is difficult to see it as something that had to be invented.

This triumph has also brought into being a new tradition in landscape writing. The anti-lawn treatise attacks both the idea of the velvety expanse—David Quammen has observed, only half jokingly, that though Communism has fallen, “lawnism” continues—and the real labor that goes into pursuing it. The writer in this tradition toils in the hope (probably vain) of reversing more than a hundred and fifty years of gardening history. He envisions an American landscape that looks more like it did in Downing’s day—one covered in moss, or scrub, or, alternatively, just weeds.

Among the dozen or so main grasses that make up the American lawn, almost none are native to America. Kentucky bluegrass comes from Europe and northern Asia, Bermuda grass from Africa, and Zoysia grass from East Asia. These and other so-called turfgrasses are botanically ambidextrous; they can reproduce sexually, by

Lawns in the U.S. cover an area roughly the size of New York State; each year, forty billion dollars is spent on their upkeep.



putting out seeds, and asexually, by spreading laterally. (Biologists believe that they acquired this second ability some twenty million years ago, during the Miocene, when large herbivores, including the ancestors of the modern horse, switched from eating leaves to munching grass.)

Mowing turfgrass quite literally cuts off the option of sexual reproduction. From the gardener's perspective, the result is a denser, thicker mat of green. From the grasses' point of view, the result is a perpetual state of vegetable adolescence. With every successive trim, the plants are forcibly rejuvenated. In his anti-lawn essay "Why Mow?," Michael Pollan puts it this way: "Lawns are nature purged of sex and death. No wonder Americans like them so much."

In the early days of lawns—British aristocrats started planting them sometime around the start of the eighteenth century—there were two ways to mow. A landowner could use grazing animals, like sheep, which meant also employing sheepkeepers, or he could send out bands of scythe-wielding servants. Then, in 1830, Edwin Beard Budding, an engineer from Gloucestershire, came up with a third alternative—"a machine for mowing lawns, etc." (Supposedly, Budding was inspired by the rotating blades then used to trim the nap on carpets.) Budding's invention

made the task of cutting grass faster and cheaper and, at least for the maker of the new mowers, profitable. Further mechanical improvements followed. In 1870, an American inventor named Elwood McGuire designed a lightweight mower with an innovative wheel design. By 1885, U.S. manufacturers were pumping out machines at the rate of fifty thousand a year. In 1893, the first steam-powered mower was patented, and a few decades later the gasoline-powered mower hit the market. An advertisement for an Ideal Junior Power Mower, from 1922, celebrated the exceptional efficiency of the new technology. It asserted that many property owners, "who previously had to hire two or three men to keep their grass cut, now do the work with one of these."

A lawn may be pleasing to look at, or provide the children with a place to play, or offer the dog room to relieve himself, but it has no productive value. The only work it does is cultural. In Downing's day, the servant-mowed lawn stood, eloquently, for the power structure that made it possible: who but the very rich could afford such a pointless luxury? As mechanical mowers enabled middle-class suburbanites to cut their own grass, this meaning was lost and a different one took hold. A lawn came to signal its owner's commitment to a communi-

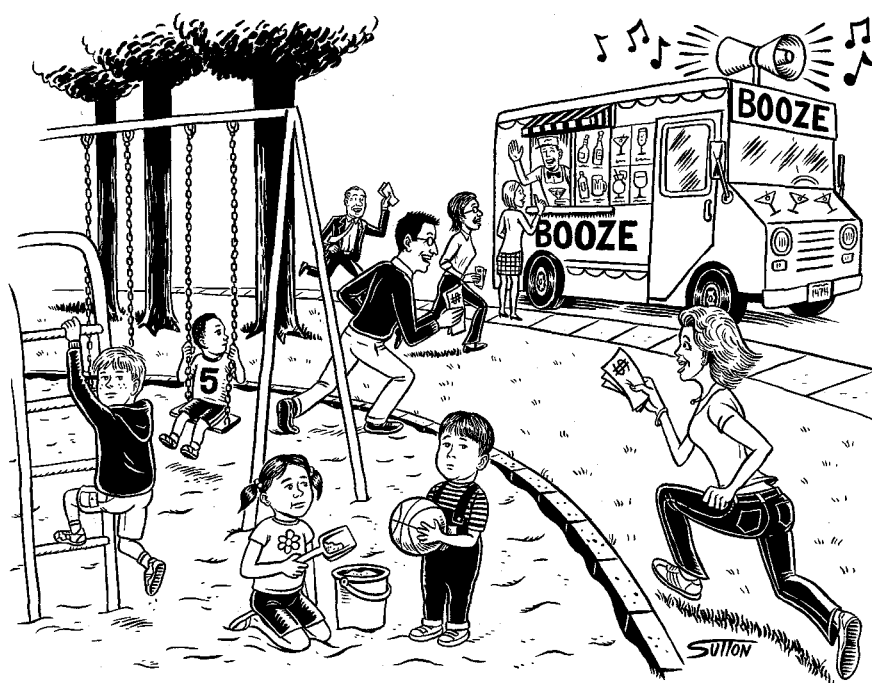
tarian project: the upkeep of the green-sward that linked one yard to the next.

"A fine carpet of green grass stamps the inhabitants as good neighbors, as desirable citizens," Abraham Levitt wrote. (By covenant, the original Levittowners agreed to mow their lawns once a week between April 15th and November 15th.) "The appearance of a lawn bespeaks the personal values of the resident," a group called the Lawn Institute declared. "Some feel that a person who keeps the lawn perfectly clipped is a person who can be trusted."

Over time, the fact that anyone could keep up a lawn was successfully, though not altogether logically, translated into the notion that everyone *ought* to. Many communities around the country adopted "weed laws" mandating that all yards be maintained to a certain uniform standard. Such laws are, for the most part, still on the books. Homeowners who, for one reason or another, don't toe the line have found themselves receiving citations and fines and, in some (admittedly unusual) cases, wrangling with the police. Just last summer, a seventy-year-old widow from Orem, Utah, was led in handcuffs to a holding cell, after letting her grass go brown. She became a celebrity in the blogosphere, where she was known as the Lawn Lady.

Pretty much by definition, a lawn is unnatural. Still, there are degrees of unnaturalness. Even as the American lawn was being democratized, it was also becoming more artificial.

Turfgrasses have a seasonal cycle: they grow quickly when conditions are favorable—for cool-weather species like Kentucky bluegrass, this is in spring, while for warm-weather species like Bermuda grass it's in summer—and then they slow down. During the slow phase, the grass becomes dull-colored or, if the weather is dry, yellow or brown. In 1909, a German chemist named Fritz Haber figured out how to synthesize ammonia. One use for what became known as the Haber-Bosch process was to manufacture explosives—the process was perfected just in time for the First World War—and a second was to produce synthetic fertilizer. It was observed that repeated applications of synthetic fertilizer could



counteract turfgrasses' seasonal cycle by, in effect, tricking the plants into putting out new growth. Sensing a potential bonanza, lawn-care companies began marketing the idea of an ever-green green. The Scotts Company recommended that customers apply its fertilizer, Turf Builder, no fewer than five times a year.

With the advent of herbicides, in the nineteen-forties, still tighter control became possible. As long as a hand trowel was the only option, weeding a lawn had been considered more or less hopeless, and most guides advised against even trying. (A lawn "thickly starred with the glowing yellow blossoms" of dandelions "isn't in itself a bad picture," the journal *Country Life in America* observed consolingly.) The new herbicides allowed gardeners to kill off plants that they didn't care for with a single spraying.

One of the most popular herbicides was—and continues to be—2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid, or 2,4-D, as it is commonly known, a major ingredient in Agent Orange. Regrettably, 2,4-D killed not only dandelions but also plants that were beneficial to lawns, like nitrogen-fixing clover. To cover up this loss, any plant that the chemical eradicated was redefined as an enemy. "Once considered the ultimate in fine turf, a clover lawn is looked upon today by most authorities as not much better than a weed patch" is how one guidebook explained the change.

The greener, purer lawns that the chemical treatments made possible were, as monocultures, more vulnerable to pests, and when grubs attacked the resulting brown spot showed up like lipstick on a collar. The answer to this chemically induced problem was to apply more chemicals. As Paul Robbins reports in "Lawn People" (2007), the first pesticide popularly spread on lawns was lead arsenate, which tended to leave behind both lead and arsenic contamination. Next in line were DDT and chlordane. Once they were shown to be toxic, pesticides like diazinon and chlorpyrifos—both of which affect the nervous system—took their place. Diazinon and chlorpyrifos, too, were eventually revealed to be hazardous. (Diazinon came under scrutiny after birds started dropping dead around a recently sprayed golf course.) The insecticide car-

baryl, which is marketed under the trade name Sevin, is still broadly applied to lawns. A likely human carcinogen, it has been shown to cause developmental damage in lab animals, and is toxic to—among many other organisms—tadpoles, salamanders, and honeybees. In "American Green" (2006), Ted Steinberg, a professor of history at Case Western Reserve University, compares the lawn to "a nationwide chemical experiment with homeowners as the guinea pigs."

Meanwhile, the risks of the chemical lawn are not confined to the people who own the lawns, or to the creatures that try to live in them. Rain and irrigation carry synthetic fertilizers into streams and lakes, where the excess nutrients contribute to algae blooms that, in turn, produce aquatic "dead zones." Manhattanites may not keep lawns, but they drink the chemicals that run off them. A 2002 report found traces of thirty-seven pesticides in streams feeding into the Croton River Watershed. A few years ago, Toronto banned the use of virtually all lawn pesticides and herbicides, including 2,4-D and carbaryl, on the ground that they pose a health risk, especially to children.

Although it was not intended as such, Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," published in 1962, is often cited as the first work in the anti-lawn tradition. In her study of America's indiscriminate use of pesticides, Carson was repeatedly led back to the front yard.

"One may get a jar-type attachment for the garden hose, for example, by which such extremely dangerous chemicals as chlordane or dieldrin are applied as one waters the lawn," she observed. "Power mowers also have been fitted with devices for the dissemination of pesticides, attachments that will dispense a cloud of vapor as the homeowner goes about the task of mowing." Rarely, she argued, was the homeowner aware of the dangers of what he was doing, because it was not in the interests of the manufacturer to inform him of these. "Instead, the typical illustration portrays a happy family scene,

father and son smilingly preparing to apply the chemical to the lawn, small children tumbling over the grass with a dog."

Right around the time that Carson was writing "Silent Spring," Lorrie Otto, a mother of two from the Milwaukee suburb of Bayside, decided to restore her front lawn to prairie. One day, while she was folding laundry in her basement,

some village workers arrived and, without consulting her, mowed her yard. Otto began speaking out against lawns, calling them, among other things, "sterile," "monotonous," and "flagrantly wasteful." Her talks inspired the founding, in 1979, of what might be described as the nation's first

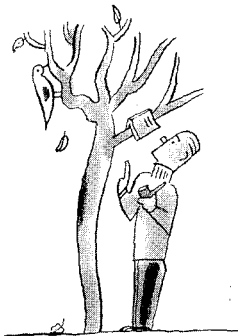
grassroots anti-grass movement, which dubbed itself Wild Ones. (Wild Ones now has chapters in twelve states, including New York and Connecticut.)

Between them, Carson and Otto introduced all the main anti-lawn arguments: toxicity, habitat destruction, resource depletion, enforced conformity. They accepted the moral interpretation of the lawn, only to perform yet another inversion. Instead of demonstrating that a homeowner cared about his neighbors, a trim and tidy stretch of turf showed that he didn't.

"If they're so large that you cannot use just a little hand-push lawn mower, then I truly think they are evil," Otto once said of lawns. "Really evil."

But what is the conscientious suburbanite supposed to do? If one accepts the idea that lawns are, in a deep sense, unethical, how does one fill the front yard?

Over the years, many alternatives to the lawn have been proposed. Pollan, in his book "Second Nature" (1991), suggests replacing parts—or all—of the lawn with garden. In "Noah's Garden" (1993), Sara Stein, by contrast, advocates "ungardening"—essentially allowing the grass to revert to thicket. Sally and Andy Wasowski, in their "Requiem for a Lawn-mower" (2004), recommend filling the yard with native trees and wildflowers. For those who don't want to give up the look or the playing space provided by a lawn, the Wasowskis suggest using Buffalo grass, one of the very few turf



species native to North America. Smaller American Lawns Today, or SALT, is a concept developed by William Niering, who for many years was a professor of botany at Connecticut College. Niering planted trees around his property, then left most of the rest of his yard unmowed, to become a meadow. "The meadow can take as much of your remaining lawn as you want," he observes in an essay posted on SALT's Web site. "There are some people who prefer no lawn, which is ideal!" For the past few decades, David Benner, a horticulturist from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, has been touting moss as an alternative to grass: he himself has a one-acre "moss garden." Recently, there have been several calls to make the lawnspace productive. In "Food Not Lawns" (2006), Heather C. Flores argues that the average yard could yield several hundred pounds of fruits and vegetables per year. (If you live in an urban area and don't have a lawn, she suggests digging up your driveway.) "Edible Estates" (2008) is the chronicle of a project by Fritz Haeg, an architect and artist, who rips up conventional front yards in order to replace them with visually striking "edible plantings." Haeg calls his approach "full-frontal gardening."

Of course, to advocate a single replacement for the lawn is to risk reproducing the problem. The essential trouble with the American lawn is its estrangement from place: it is not a response to the landscape so much as an idea imposed upon it—all green, all the time, everywhere. Recently, a NASA-funded study, which used satellite data collected by the Department of Defense, determined that, including golf courses, lawns in the United States cover nearly fifty thousand square miles—an area roughly the size of New York State. The same study concluded that most of this New York State-size lawn was growing in places where turfgrass should never have been planted. In order to keep all the lawns in the country well irrigated, the author of the study calculated, it would take an astonishing two hundred gallons of water per person, per day. According to a separate estimate, by the Environmental Protection Agency, nearly a third of all residential water use in the United States currently goes toward landscaping.

The Northeast is one of the relatively few regions in the country that are actu-

ally well suited to lawns. There, the simplest alternative to the modern, industrialized lawn may be a lawn that functions more or less as it did in the eighteen-forties, before herbicides or even sprinklers had been invented. In "Redesigning the American Lawn" (1993), F. Herbert Bormann, Diana Balmori, and Gordon T. Geballe dub such a lawn the Freedom Lawn. The Freedom Lawn consists of grass mixed with whatever else happens to seed itself, which, the authors note, might include:

dandelion, violets, bluets, spurrey, chickweed, chrysanthemum, brown-eyed Susan, partridge berry, Canada mayflower, various clovers, plantains, evening primrose, rushes, and wood rush, as well as grasses not usually associated with the well-manicured lawn, such as broomsedge, sweet vernal grass, timothy, quack grass, oat grass, crabgrass, and foxtail grass.

The Freedom Lawn is still mowed—preferably with a push-mower—but it is watered infrequently, if at all, and receives no chemical "inputs." If a brown spot develops, it is likely soon to be filled by what some might call weeds, but which Bormann, Balmori, and Geballe would rather refer to as "low growing broad-leaved plants."

The anti-lawn movement has been around now for several decades. In that time, thousands of American families have dug up their lawns and put in wildflowers or meadows or vegetable gardens. In that same period, however, millions more have put in new lawns. A recent study by researchers at Ohio State University estimates that, owing to new development, the space devoted to turfgrass in the United States is growing at the rate of almost six hundred square miles a year.

The easy explanation for the failure of the anti-lawn movement is that change is hard. People have been trained to expect lawns, and this expectation is self-reinforcing: weed laws are all but explicitly about maintaining property values. When Haeg installed an "edible estate" in the front yard of a Salina, Kansas, resident named Stan Cox, passersby kept asking Cox whether his neighbors had complained about it yet. Everyone "claims to like the new front yard, yet everyone expects others not to like it," Cox writes. For a developer, meanwhile, putting in turfgrass is by far the easiest

way to landscape; what is sometimes called "contractor's mix" grass seed is specifically formulated to provide a fast-growing—though not necessarily long-lasting—green. (Lowe's, which sells fifteen pounds of contractor's-mix seed for \$23.52, advertises it as an "economy mixture that provides quick grass cover.") The lawn may be wasteful and destructive, it may even be dangerous, but it is, in its way, convenient.

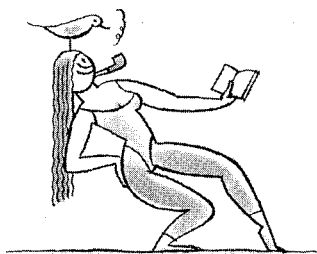
This is perhaps the final stage of the American lawn. What began as a symbol of privilege and evolved into an expression of shared values has now come to represent expedience. We no longer choose to keep lawns; we just keep on keeping them. In the meantime, the familiar image of Dad cutting the grass and then, beer in hand, sitting back to admire his work, is, in many communities, a fiction: increasingly, lawn care has become another one of those jobs, like cooking dinner or playing with the kids, that's outsourced to someone else. When my husband and I lived in Westchester County, he used to mow our minuscule Freedom Lawn—"freedom" here being understood as just another word for nothing left to lose—himself. That he did so was not a source of pride around our house but vague embarrassment.

If Downing came back today, what would he think of our lawns? Presumably, the neatness of our pigless yards would impress him. But it is hard not to feel that he would, at least, be ambivalent. Downing was passionate about landscape gardening, and even more so about its edifying possibilities. He urged his readers to improve their yards not just for the sake of their own uplift and enjoyment but in the interest of the greater good; through the "principle of imitation," they would become models for their neighbors, and in this way a single example of refinement could transform a "graceless village." We now have lawns smoother and more velvety than Downing could have imagined. And yet our relationship to the Beautiful remains vexed. As the anti-lawnists correctly observe, the American lawn now represents a serious civic problem. That the space devoted to it continues to grow—and that more and more water and chemicals and fertilizer are devoted to its upkeep—doesn't prove that we care so much as that we are careless. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

City of Thieves, by David Benioff (*Viking*; \$24.95). In the six years since his critically praised debut, "The 25th Hour," Benioff has produced a story collection and a handful of screenplays, including the blockbuster "Troy." The imprint of his film work is evident in this novel, a finely honed but too easily sentimental adventure story set during the siege of Leningrad. Lev, the mousy, virginal son of a disappeared Jewish poet, is jailed by the Russian Army for looting; in prison and awaiting execution, he shares a cell with a blowhard blond infantryman accused of desertion. When a strange colonel offers the pair an impossible task in exchange for their lives, they set off on a journey that takes them through a series of nightmarish war zones, populated by cannibals, prostitutes, starving children, and demonic Nazi chess enthusiasts. Benioff finds a good deal of humor amid the grisly absurdities of wartime, but does so at the expense of real emotional engagement.

The Sister, by Poppy Adams (*Knopf*; \$23.95). This suspenseful first novel is set in a crumbling Dorset mansion and features two aging sisters, reunited after a separation of nearly fifty years. Virginia is the sensible older sister who stayed, carrying on the family tradition of lepidopterology, while the reckless and free-spirited Vivien left to lead a cosmopolitan life in London. The story, told from Virginia's eerily limited perspective, involves their parents' descent into sadistic and capricious behavior, an accident in Vivien's youth that left her unable to have children, and a plan that she had for her husband to impregnate Virginia instead. Adams creates an engrossing atmosphere of gothic mystery, but many of the psychological dramas come to feel like set pieces rather than like genuine conflicts.



Night Wraps the Sky: Writings by and About Mayakovsky, edited by Michael Almereyda (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*; \$27). At the height of his fame, in the nineteen-twenties, the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky was arguably the leading figure in Soviet art. Perhaps only Walt Whitman—whom Mayakovsky passionately admired—wrote with similar breadth and exhilaration. This volume offers some of Mayakovsky's best works in vivid translations, and interleaves them with essays, photographs, and historical documents (including a complaint by a Tsarist prison governor about the poet's refusal to obey commands). In 1930, at the age of thirty-six, Mayakovsky, disillusioned and trapped by the government that he had virtually represented, put a bullet through his heart; for Joseph Brodsky, he was "the first major victim." His tone of offhand ecstasy helped to produce, decades later, a spectacular new American poetry. It was Mayakovsky who taught Frank O'Hara to talk directly to the sun, and the book includes O'Hara's beaming account of their conversation.

Bordeaux/Burgundy, by Jean-Robert Pitte, translated from the French by M.B. DeBevoise (*California*; \$24.95). Pitte, a specialist in wine geographies, relates a long and fierce oenophile war in this charming history. Although Bordeaux wine has been an engine of innovation in the world of viticulture—British and Dutch merchants began marketing it in the late seventeenth century, and the Bordeaux bottle, whose familiar profile was created in the nineteenth century, became an international standard—Burgundy long dominated the tastes of Parisian élites. For Pitte, Burgundy, more aromatic, alcoholic, and full-bodied, is the "prince of sensual wines" and Bordeaux the prince of serious wines. The two princes, it seems, reign over the two halves of the French soul—Catholic, peasant, Rabelaisian Burgundy vs. bourgeois, *dirigiste* Bordeaux. Pitte attempts to make peace, but the reader may feel that the rivalry is so characteristically French that any rapprochement would be a pity.

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INFERNAL OPERA

Zimmermann's "Die Soldaten" at the Park Avenue Armory.

BY ALEX ROSS

When Mozart placed a loud, dark, bone-chilling chord of D minor in the first bars of "Don Giovanni," he set a new precedent for operatic curtain-raisers: instead of charming his listeners into paying attention, he would stun them into submission, with intimations of the awakening of the dead and the opening of the gates of Hell. Modern scholarship suggests that Mozart may have derived aspects of his famous gesture from none other than Antonio Salieri, that most unfairly abused of composers, whose opera "La Grotta di Trofonio," premièred two years before "Don Giovanni," contains some strikingly similar demonic noises. Ever since, composers have tried to outdo each other with carefully engineered hammer blows of fate. Verdi's "Otello" begins with a rumbling six-note dissonance; Strauss's "Elektra" with a souped-up D-minor detonation; Alban Berg's "Lulu" with a sharply stabbing figure that foreshadows the heroine's fate.

Bernd Alois Zimmermann's 1965 opera "Die Soldaten," the story of a woman's degradation at the hands of a series of heartless soldiers, has a prelude of such stupefying intensity that it stands for the moment as the ne plus ultra. The full orchestra sustains an enormous dissonance spread out over many octaves. Beneath it, the timpani pound out, "in iron rhythm," the note D—perhaps a nod backward to "Don Giovanni." The onslaught returns several times as the prelude unfolds, though it periodically gives way to a frenzy of competing voices: the trumpets tangle in independent rhythms, violins buzz around maniacally in their upper registers, the timpani repeatedly fall out of synch with the principal one-two pulse. The music is at once hyper-organized and deranged, a death machine that leaves chaos in its wake.

The masterstroke of David Pountney's production of "Die Soldaten"—an amazing, alarming spectacle that had

its première two years ago, in a former steelworks in Bochum, Germany, and travelled last week to the Park Avenue Armory, as part of the Lincoln Center Festival—is to put the audience at the mercy of a physical mechanism that is nearly as formidable as the infernal devices suggested in the score. Before the music started, we were seated in bleachers, which rested on wheels at one end of an array of railroad tracks. When Steven Sloane, the conductor, gave the downbeat, the apparatus began gliding slowly across the vast expanse of the Armory's Drill Hall. Five minutes later, we came to a halt at the far end of the space, more than two hundred feet away. As we moved, we passed the writhing orchestra, which was positioned on risers to the left; it was a bit like taking a hot-air-balloon ride over a volcanic eruption. I imagined Mozart saying, "O.K., you win."

With certain artists, the summoning of apocalyptic visions can seem a calculated move, a swaggering display of power. With Zimmermann, however, there is no question of insincerity. He was born in 1918, grew up amid the insanity of Hitler's Germany, and served in Poland, France, and Russia during the Second World War. In the wake of his wartime experiences, he focussed obsessively on themes of social injustice, reserving his greatest scorn for racism and militarism. The bleakness of his world view was doubtless related to the anguish of his daily life: he was beset by a severe skin condition, debilitating eye problems, and attacks of depression. Friends found him lively company, but despair overwhelmed him in the end; in 1970, at the age of fifty-two, he committed suicide—an act that he had contemplated, according to his diary, as early as 1945.

If Zimmermann found any relief from his agonies, it may have been by transmuting them into music. Most of his

works rely on Schoenberg's twelve-tone method of composition, but the system is employed less as a free-standing, abstract language than as a kind of master matrix on which any kind of material can be plotted. Thus, the twelve-note row of his 1954 trumpet concerto, "Nobody Knows de Trouble I See," allows for the incorporation of the African-American spiritual of the same name and, implicitly, for a denunciation of racism. Zimmermann called his music "pluralist," in the sense that it absorbs many genres and the styles of many eras. Yet it is not exactly an egalitarian free-for-all; often, popular sounds take on a diabolical tinge, representing a world that, in thrall to lust and greed, has lost its moral bearings.

"Die Soldaten," composed in the late nineteen-fifties and extensively revised before its 1965 première, is based on a play by Jakob Lenz, a visionary eighteenth-century writer of the Sturm und Drang period who looked ahead to naturalism and expressionism. Marie, the heroine, naïvely goes in pursuit of various preening officers, and, as she is passed from one to the other, she loses the spark of life. Reduced to prostitution



In David Pountney's staging, brutality threa

in the final scene, she goes unrecognized by her own father. Zimmermann, imitating Berg's example in "Wozzeck" and "Lulu," condensed the play into an episodic, at times surreally blurred structure. The words come from Lenz, but the web of musical allusions, encompassing Renaissance fanfares, Bach chorales, brooding Wagnerian harmonies, electric jazz, and futuristic tape sounds, widens the drama into a timeless morality play. The major weakness is in the vocal writing, which lacks variety and fails to create strong distinctions among the characters. The orchestra really drives the action; the singers, perhaps fittingly, are cogs in the machine.

For an opera of such extreme logistical complexity—the score requires an orchestra of more than a hundred players, some seventy percussion instruments, a jazz combo, and truckloads of electronics—"Die Soldaten" is staged fairly often. I have heard it twice before: at New York City Opera, in 1991, and at the Semperoper, in Dresden, in 1995. Opera directors, with their love for the lurid, seem to relish the opportunity to pile horror upon

horror; while the libretto calls for one rape, we are usually subjected to rapes galore. Pountney's staging, with sets by Robert Innes Hopkins, was no exception. Men dressed as Santa Claus held down screaming women. A male servant's buttocks were groped. One victim was left a bloody pulp. Brutality threatened to become an abstraction, stylized and trivialized. Yet the grandeur of the conception pushed the clichés into the background; the Armory became a kind of scenic landscape of the deadly sins.

The action took place on a runway that extended down the middle of the Armory, with the bleachers, which moved intermittently, on either side. At times, the audience passed close enough to the singers so that the opera became almost a chamber play. The arrangement was a boon to Claudia Barainsky, the soprano singing Marie, who extracted a degree of lyricism and playful glitter from her cruelly difficult part. Claudio Otelli, nobly pained as Marie's first lover, Stolzius, and Kay Stieffermann, showing a strong baritone voice as Field Officer Mary, were other standouts in the cast. Unfortunately, the un-

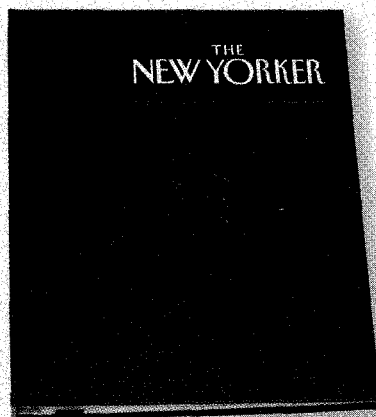
usual placement of the orchestra, well to the side of the singers, meant that many instrumental details floated away in the Armory's acoustical cavern—in particular, the intimate entanglements of alto flute, saxophone, guitar, and other solo parts, which echo the darkly ravishing sound world of Pierre Boulez's "Marteau sans Maître." Still, creative amplification allowed for a good general picture of the score. The Bochum Symphony played with fiery commitment; Sloane presided confidently over the horde of performers.

The ending of this "Soldaten" was as impressive as the opening. As Marie went to her fate, and as the bleachers receded to their original position, a storm of electronic noise engulfed the audience, emanating both from loudspeakers hanging overhead and from subwoofers beneath the seats. In the orchestra, snare drummers rapped out a military beat, to numbing effect. Finally, screams went up from the speakers—according to Zimmermann's original conception, the voices of victims of an atomic blast—while the orchestra intoned the note D in a slowly dying unison. Subtle, no; awesome, yes. ♦

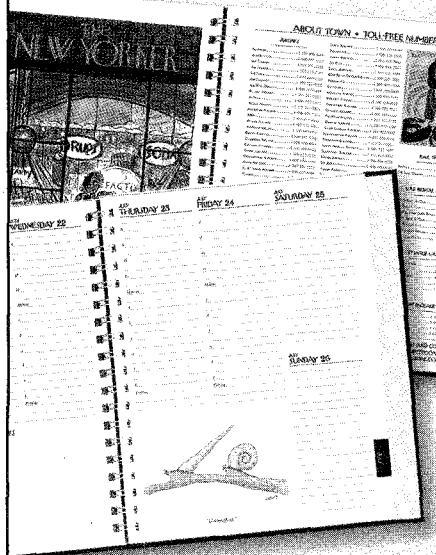


come trivialized, but the grandeur of his conception makes the Armory a scenic landscape of the deadly sins. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

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David Simon's "Generation Kill."

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

"Generation Kill," a new miniseries on HBO, is based on a 2004 book by Evan Wright, which is an expanded version of a three-part series that was published in *Rolling Stone*, in 2003, about the time Wright spent embedded with a Marine battalion in Iraq. It's not necessarily the case that a heart beats less robustly when it's transplanted, but Wright's creation has become more attenuated with each step it has taken—from magazine article to book to TV miniseries. For one thing, although the title of the magazine series, "The Killer Elite," may not be especially original, it's more piquant, because of its very accuracy, than "Generation Kill," which is Wright's attempt to coin a phrase that plays off "the greatest generation." Wright had the good fortune—reportorially speaking—to be in Iraq from the beginning of the invasion, so he was well situated to observe how the war unfolded and how the men he was ensconced with did, or didn't, change as a result. His articles, which end shortly after the Marines entered Baghdad, appeared just a few months after the invasion and had an organic immediacy—although Wright wrote them after returning home to the States, you could imagine him sitting in the desert ripping pages out of a manual typewriter and sending them off with a courier. The third paragraph of the *Rolling Stone* series starts in classic field-dispatch fashion: "The war began twenty-four hours ago." The third paragraph of the book starts with a yawn: "Their war began several days ago." The magazine pieces are punchy; in the book, the tone has been neutralized and the author's voice is not nearly as present. Fatally, it is entirely missing from the miniseries.

"Generation Kill," which airs in what I'll always think of as the "Sopranos" time slot—Sundays at nine—was created by David Simon, whose HBO se-

ries "The Wire" recently finished its fifth and final season. (That show also ran in Tony's time slot.) "The Wire" could have been called "The Web"—each season involved a different element of life in Baltimore (the drug trade, the waterfront, the city bureaucracy, the educational system, and the press), creating, over all, an intricate picture of the way things work, and don't work, in that city. It's possible that if Simon had used "Generation Kill" not as a blueprint but as a jumping-off point he might have come up with something richer than he did. (The series was written by Simon, Ed Burns—Simon's collaborator on "The Wire"—and Wright.)

Actually, it's a little surprising that Simon went for this material at all. If you watched TV during the first two weeks of the war, you'll remember that it was covered exhaustively and enthusiastically, as if it were a hot, sandy pep rally. Troop movements, weather conditions, equipment, terminology, and geography—reporters practically got drunk on it all, egged on, presumably, by the networks, some of which sported American-flag graphics during their war coverage. However you judge the response of American news organizations during the early days of the war, they certainly made those days vivid to viewers, and they helped us understand the terrible significance of the resistance the Marines faced in southern Iraq as they made their way from Kuwait to Baghdad. Wright's pieces, coming out so soon after the invasion, brought the same kind of reality home—even more so, since he had greater control over his narrative than the TV reporters did: they were literally blown about by the wind while they were on camera and sometimes were made almost invisible by all-encompassing sandstorms. But that unforgettable time was more than five years ago, and I don't see anything to be gained by retracing the

path from Kuwait to Baghdad. Tell us, as they say, something we don't know.

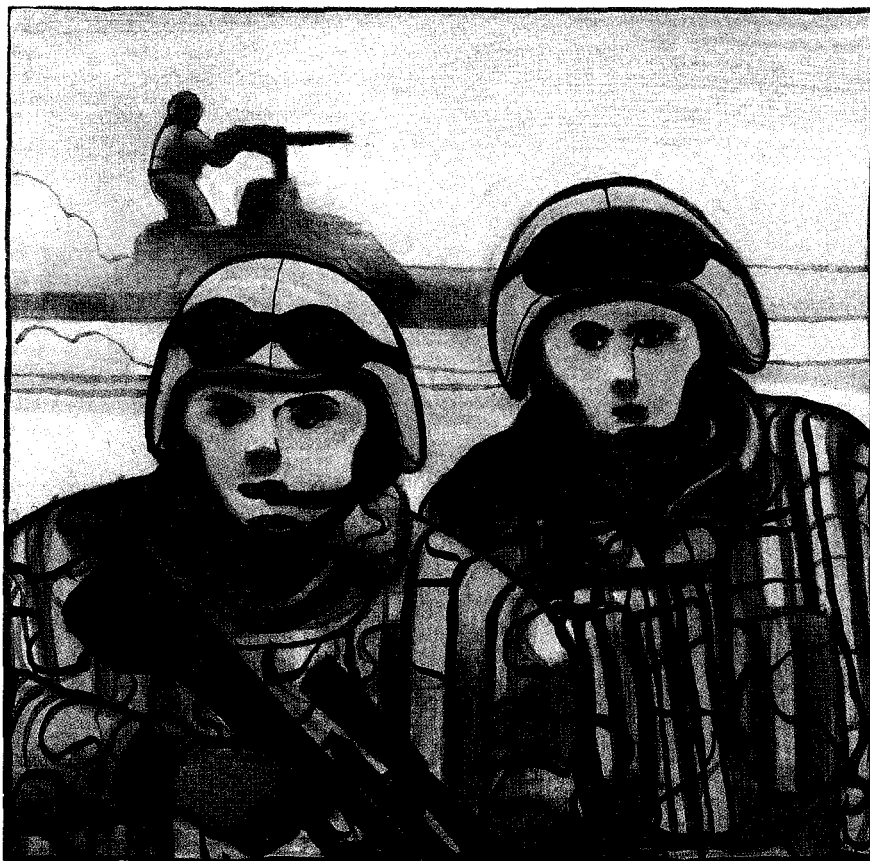
On the other hand, there would certainly be room right now for a drama about the war that emphasized ideas as well as trying to describe the experience, one that went further up the chain of command to the real decision-makers. But "Generation Kill" is lose-lose in that regard: it has too many characters for the writers to be able to do more than create thumbnail sketches, and it seems convinced that verisimilitude and earnest believability—simple accretion of "slice of life" detail—will add up to drama and watchability. One of the marines in the First Reconnaissance Battalion, with whom Wright travelled, Sergeant Rudy Reyes—who has Hollywood good looks and, indeed, plays himself in the miniseries—told NPR that the show sticks closely to the book. "They don't dramatize nothing," he said. "There's nothing more dramatic going on than a unit of recon marines with no close air support or armor running and gunning into insurgents that are holed up in towns and fighting to the death." And what's never acknowledged in the series is the fact that what we're seeing is only one writer's reality. The writer onscreen (played by Lee Tergesen) is never named—the men in the platoon call him "Reporter" or "Writer" or nothing—and he's rarely on camera. Only occasionally is he embedded in the actual drama. One is to some extent grateful for that. Wright doesn't get in the way in the book, either, and you feel that he's intelligent and has a good eye. But the writer in the series is a nearly mute cipher; I suppose his dullness is meant to indicate that he's a decent sort and a true professional, and not a representative of the hated media.

There is very little in "Generation Kill" to distinguish it from other war-is-hell dramas, such as Steven Bochco's 2005 series "Over There"—though civilians never cease to be surprised by the facts of military life. In the case of "Generation Kill," that glaring fact is that First Recon's mission is one that its men aren't trained for. An élite group of marines whipped into spectacular physical shape, whose function is to scramble stealthily ahead of regular troops and scout the enemy's positions behind the lines, they are asked to drive north to Baghdad in a convoy of Humvees, like sitting ducks. But to a man they're all up for it; some of them, in fact,

are frustrated and angry when, at times, they receive orders not to shoot.

If we got to know any of the characters in "Generation Kill," the show might be more interesting, or, at least, more memorable. But only a few accidental distinctions set them apart: a raspy voice in one case (an officer who had throat cancer), hair and skin color in oth-

like little more than an adventure story with a few unpleasant wrinkles and an occasional nod to the ethical dilemmas and battlefield difficulties unique to this conflict. The show doesn't shy away from portraying certain absurdities and outrages—a lot is made of the fact that one officer is obsessed with the width of some of the platoon members' mustaches, and,



A Marine battalion heads for Baghdad in the early days of the war.

ers. Some talk more than others. It's clear that the laconic Sergeant Brad Colbert (Alexander Skarsgård), the leader of the team that Wright chooses to ride with, is the hero of the piece, because the camera stays on his face to record his every reaction, which is almost always a smile of some kind—rueful, encouraging, conspiratorial, wise, depending on whom he's trying to placate at the time. The smile is an all-purpose, strong-silent-type reaction into which we can read anything, and which substitutes for clarity, psychological or otherwise. At the start of the war, it was useful to be reminded of what was involved in being a soldier, but at this remove such a "faithful" depiction comes across as an abdication, a moral failure to judge and to acknowledge the horrors that followed—it makes the war in Iraq feel

at the other end of the scale, you see civilian casualties and marines carrying out various levels of abuse, including one officer who repeatedly jabs his bayonet into the ground next to a prisoner's head. But one of the most sickening episodes in the book is whitewashed in the series. In the book, as a marine reaches into a car that's been riddled with bullets to pick up a little girl, "the top of her head slides off and her brains fall out"; in the series, the girl is dead, but intact. In a show like this, if you're going to get real, you have to go all the way. ♦

DEPARTMENT OF DELICACY

From the Belmont (Mass.) Citizen-Herald.

A Creeley Road resident reported someone wrote an anatomically correct term on his fence in spray paint.

PAST SHOCK

"The Dark Knight" and "WALL-E."

BY DAVID DENBY

In the new Batman film, "The Dark Knight," many things go boom. Cars explode, jails and hospitals are blown up, bombs are put in people's mouths and sewn into their stomachs. There's a chase scene in which cars pile up and climb over other cars, and a truck gets lassoed by Batman (his one neat trick) and tumbles through the air like a diver doing a back flip. Men crash through windows of glass-walled office buildings, and there are many fights that employ the devastating martial-arts system known as the Keysi Fighting Method. Christian Bale, who plays Bruce Wayne (and Batman), spent months training under the masters of the ferocious and delicate K.F.M. Unfortunately, I can't tell you a thing about it, because the combat is photographed close up, in semidarkness, and cut at the speed of a fifteen-second commercial. Instead of enjoying the formalized beauty of a fighting discipline, we see a lot of flailing movement and bodies hitting the floor like grain sacks. All this ruckus is accompanied by pounding thuds on the soundtrack, with two veteran Hollywood composers (Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard) providing additional bass-heavy stomps in every scene, even when nothing is going on. At times, the movie sounds like two excited mattresses making love in an echo chamber. In brief, Warner Bros. has continued to drain the poetry, fantasy, and comedy out of Tim Burton's original conception for "Batman" (1989), completing the job of coarsening the material into hyperviolent summer action spectacle. Yet "The Dark Knight" is hardly routine—it has a kinky sadism in scene after scene, which keeps you on edge and sends you out onto the street with post-movie stress disorder. And it has one startling and artful element: the sinister and frightening performance of the late Heath Ledger as the psychopathic murderer the Joker. That part of the movie is upsetting to watch, and, in retrospect, both painful and stirring to think about.

"The Dark Knight," which was directed by Christopher Nolan (who also made "Batman Begins") and written by Nolan and his brother Jonathan, is devoted to perversity. Bruce Wayne, attempting to bring order to Gotham City, has instead provoked the thugs. The mob is running rampant, and they've infiltrated the police department. The Joker, who

but he's a placid Bruce Wayne, a swank gent in Armani suits, with every hair in place. He's more urgent as Batman, but he delivers all his lines in a hoarse voice, with an unvarying inflection. It's a dogged but uninteresting performance, upstaged by the great Ledger, who shambles and slides into a room, bending his knees and twisting his neck and suddenly surging into someone's face like a deep-sea creature coming up for air. Ledger has a fright wig of ragged hair; thick, running gobs of white makeup; scarlet lips; and dark-shadowed eyes. He's part freaky clown, part Alice Cooper the morning after, and all actor. He's mesmerizing in every scene. His voice is not sludgy and slow, as it was in "Brokeback Mountain." It's a little



Heath Ledger and Christian Bale in Christopher Nolan's new Batman movie.

doesn't care for money and wants only the power to sow chaos, intimidates everyone, including the gangsters. Wayne and the noble Lieutenant Jim Gordon (Gary Oldman) decide to get behind the new D.A., Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart), and set him up as Gotham's crime-fighting hero. Batman even thinks of retiring. But the Joker won't let him; he *needs* him, as someone to play with. An anarchist by philosophy, the Joker uses terrorist methods (bombs, bombs, bombs), and he has an enormous advantage over the principled Batman—he's ruthless. So the Joker taunts and giggles, and Batman can only extend his wings.

It's a workable dramatic conflict, but only half the team can act it. Christian Bale has been effective in some films,

higher and faster, but with odd, devastating pauses and saturnine shades of mockery. At times, I was reminded of Marlon Brando at his most feline and insinuating. When Ledger wields a knife, he is thoroughly terrifying (do not, despite the PG-13 rating, bring the children), and, as you're watching him, you can't help wondering—in a response that admittedly lies outside film criticism—how badly he messed himself up in order to play the role this way. His performance is a heroic, unsettling final act: this young actor looked into the abyss.

Parts of "The Dark Knight" were shot with IMAX cameras, and if you see the movie on one of those enormously tall screens you will feel, as Batman swoops

FRANK STOCKTON

down from a building at night, as if you were falling into a canyon. It's a giddy thrill—bring Dramamine. The rest of the movie, photographed by Wally Pfister, is sharp and clear, with shots of Gotham (i.e., Chicago) in glistening night splendor, and plentiful use of vast modernist interiors with slab floors. Yet I can't rate "The Dark Knight" as an outstanding piece of craftsmanship. "Batman Begins" was grim and methodical, and this movie is grim and jammed together. The narrative isn't shaped coherently to bring out contrasts and build toward a satisfying climax. "The Dark Knight" is constant climax; it's always in a frenzy, and it goes on forever. Nothing is prepared for, and people show up and disappear without explanation; characters are eliminated with a casual nod. There are episodes that are expensively meaningless (a Hong Kong vignette, for instance), while crucial scenes are truncated at their most interesting point—such as the moment in which the disfigured Joker confronts a newly disfigured Harvey Dent (a visual sick joke) and turns him into a vicious killer. The thunderous violence and the music jack the audience up. But all that screw-tightening tension isn't necessarily fun. "The Dark Knight" has been made in a time of terror, but it's not fighting terror; it's embracing and unleashing it—while making sure, with proper calculation, to set up the next installment of the corporate franchise.

Watching Pixar's animated film "WALL-E" must be a humbling experience for other filmmakers, because it demonstrates not just the number but the variety of ideas you need

to make a terrific movie. "WALL-E," which was directed by Andrew Stanton and written by Stanton and John Reardon, has the waggish adorableness and the tripping-and-falling rough-house of other animated films. But it's also a work of tragic nostalgia. In the ruins of a great American city, WALL-E, a robotic trash collector and compactor, continues to go about his duties after the human presence has been blown away by billowing waves of noxious dust. Accompanied only by a cockroach, WALL-E trolls among the detritus of the vanished culture; the junk items he finds become fetishes for him. He holds on to plastic forks, hubcaps, and Zippo lighters, and throws away a diamond ring while keeping the felt box (he likes containers). He lives in a steel garbage dump that is at once home, arcade, archeological museum, and church. Among his collection lies not a recording of "Messiah" or of Beethoven's Ninth but a tape of the 1969 musical "Hello, Dolly!," a movie considered lumbering and out of date when it opened. And what he watches again and again is not the famous Louis Armstrong-Barbra Streisand duet but a wan little love song, "It Only Takes a Moment"—with skinny Michael Crawford holding Marianne McAndrew's hand—and the routine dance production number "Put on Your Sunday Clothes." When a spaceship shows up and leaves behind a female robot named EVE, he woos her with the determination of a man possessed by a lyrical impulse. A bad old movie keeps the human idea alive in two robots.

The ironies move toward satire

when the two travel to EVE's home, a space station called the Axiom, where, it turns out, the remaining humans have been living for seven hundred years in a totalitarian paradise run by a giant big-box-store company, Buy N Large. The visual invention is both excruciatingly funny and haunting. Back on earth, the disused skyscrapers look like Utah monuments worn away by time and weather. The interior of the Axiom is clean and bright, in a style that might be called cruise-liner moderne with a serious touch of food-court classicism. Consumer capitalism, having taken complete control of life, decorates in pinks and blues—a soothing milieu for humans who are too fat to move on their own and who travel in comfortably bedded little hovercrafts in which screens, constantly switched on, stand in front of their faces. The robots on the Axiom include a fussy, muttering little droid who scarfs up any contaminating substance (such as soil from Earth), and squadrons of square-shouldered helots who try to squash the slightest sign of free will. "WALL-E" blends two kinds of science fiction—the post-apocalyptic disaster scenario and the dystopian fantasy derived from Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," in which people are controlled not by coercion but by pleasure. Apparently, the movie has caused annoyance in some quarters because it criticizes the American way of life. This it does, and with suavity and supreme good humor. "WALL-E" is a classic, but it will never appeal to people who are happy with art only when it has as little bite as possible. ♦

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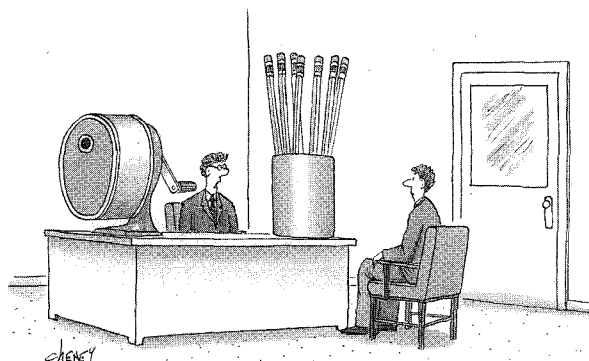
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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Leo Cullum, must be received by Sunday, July 20th. Finalists in the June 30th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 4th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"Apparently, American now charges extra for landings."
Steve Hoglund, Auburn, Wash.



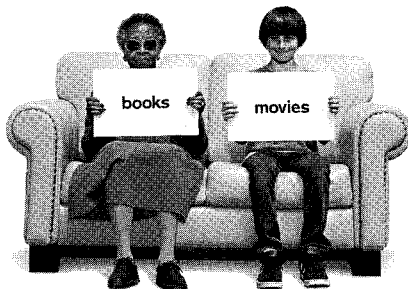
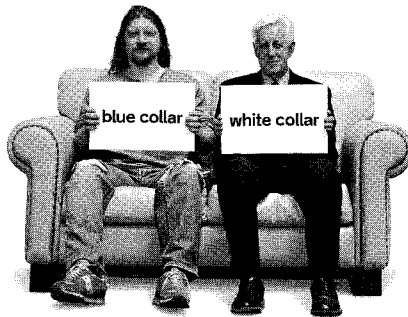
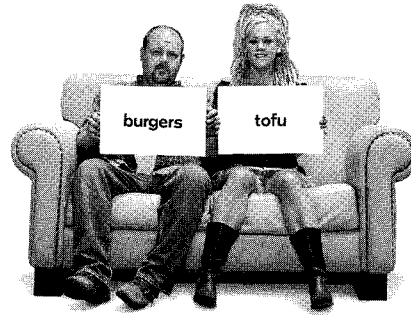
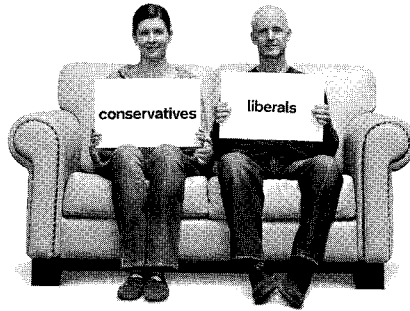
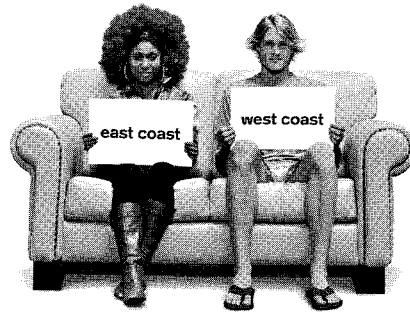
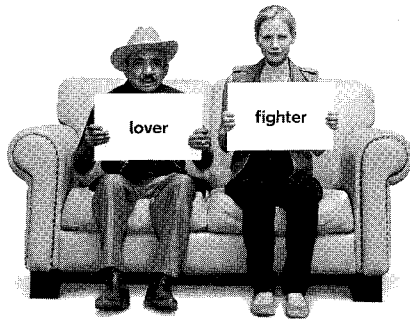
"Let's continue this discussion over a hot barrel of coffee."
Adam Caraher, New York City

"But I have to warn you, carpal tunnel here is a bitch."
Sam Cobean, Falmouth, Me.

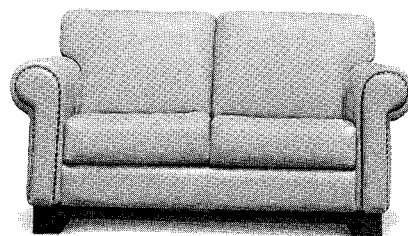
"How many accountants does it take to sharpen a pencil?" you ask? In this case five.
Matt Aucoin, Woodstock, Vt.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

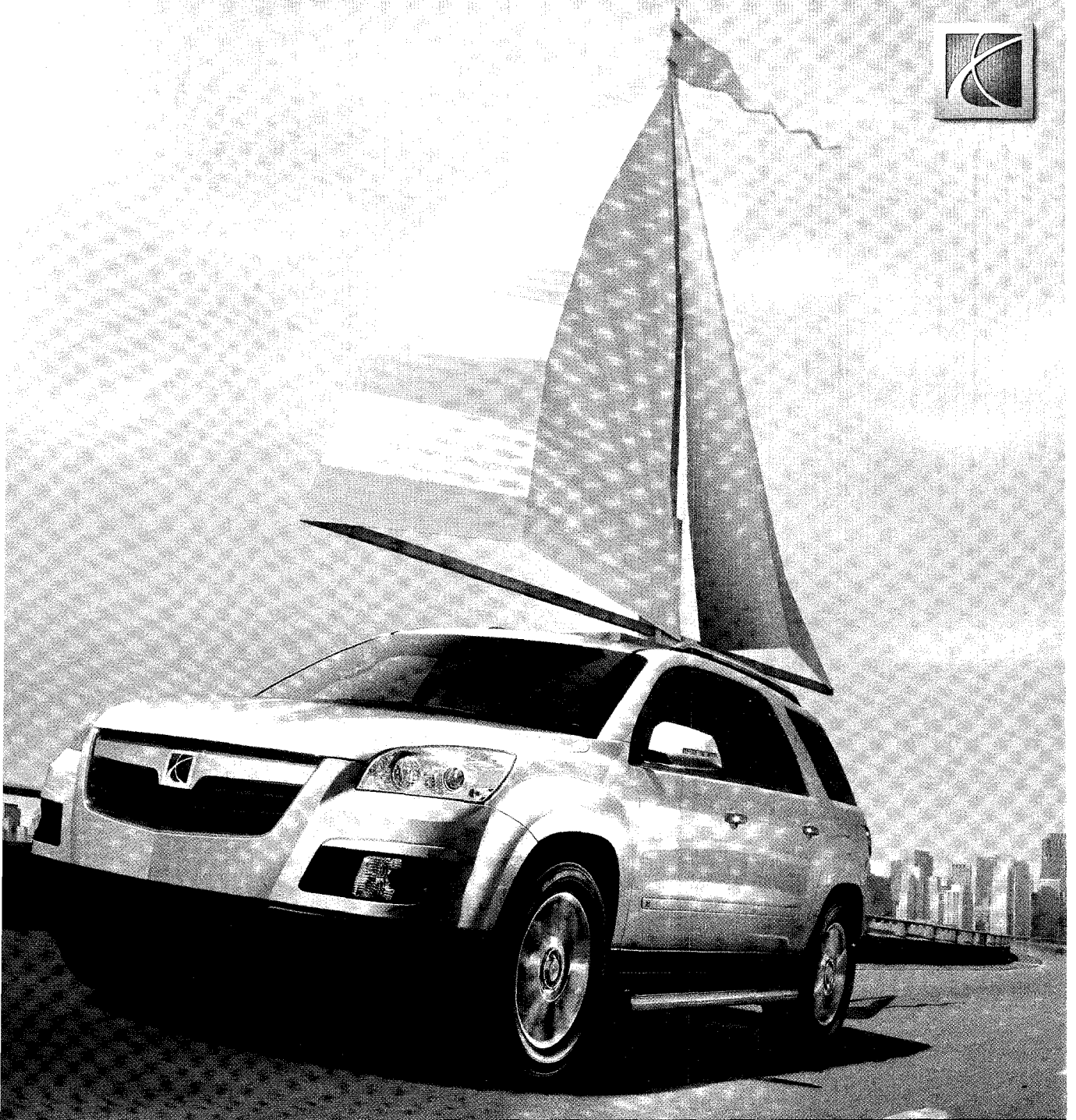
FO Wynn



It's American to disagree. It's also American to come together in the face of a challenge. And few challenges are as urgent as global climate change. More than a million people from all walks of life have come together to demand solutions. Now we need you. Take a minute and join us at wecansolveit.org. Together we can solve the climate crisis.



Join **we** today.



Rethink big.